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Tel: 0844 249 0228 or email dnsubs@servicehelpline.co.uk

UK – 12 issues: £24.00, 24 issues: £40.00, 6 issues direct debit: £10.00. **Europe** – 12 issues: £33.00, **World** – 12 issues: £35.00, **Eire** – 12 issues: £33.00

ALTERNATIVE FORMATS

Disability Now is also available on cassette, disk or via email from Talking Newspaper Enterprises

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Published by Scope, a registered charity,
no 208231. © Scope 2012

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Publishing, production and distribution management by FuturePlus. futureplus.co.uk
ISSN 0958-4676

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EDITORIAL ENGAGEMENT FOR BRANDS
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editorial

Mixed messages and the game of life

To fall back on a cliché, the proof of the Paralympic pudding will be in the eating. The chief danger is that the Games will happen inside a bubble – albeit a big and high profile bubble – while in the real world beyond the sporting triumphs, things go on pretty much as normal.

So while spectators, viewers and the media are lauding Paralympians' sporting prowess and achievements, elsewhere in the media, and with the apparent connivance of this Government, more ordinary disabled people will continue to be presented as work-shy spongers chiselling ill-deserved and exorbitant amounts of money out of a benefit system which is subsidised by hard-pressed taxpayers.

And don't make the mistake of assuming that this sort of doublethink is too subtle for the general consumer of media. It's perfectly possible for your average reader of, say, the *Daily Mail* to, on the one hand, use athletes like Oscar Pistorius to prop up their view that disabled people (well, some of us anyway) are just bloody

marvellous, while, on the other, spitting with rage at the latest news story of a benefit cheat being found out engaging in their own preferred sporting activity and using that to confirm all the prejudices they ever had about us as a group.

“Stop presenting Paralympic athletes as super-beings capable of super-human feats”

To prevent this from occurring, the press has to do two things. First, stop presenting Paralympic athletes as super-beings capable of super-human feats: show them as what they are, committed and driven elite sportspeople just like any non-disabled counterparts. Second, stop using the rest of us as whipping boys for the country's economic plight: recognise that many of us are victims, not just of economic downturn, but also of the sort of prejudice which keeps us from contributing to the general good of the nation.

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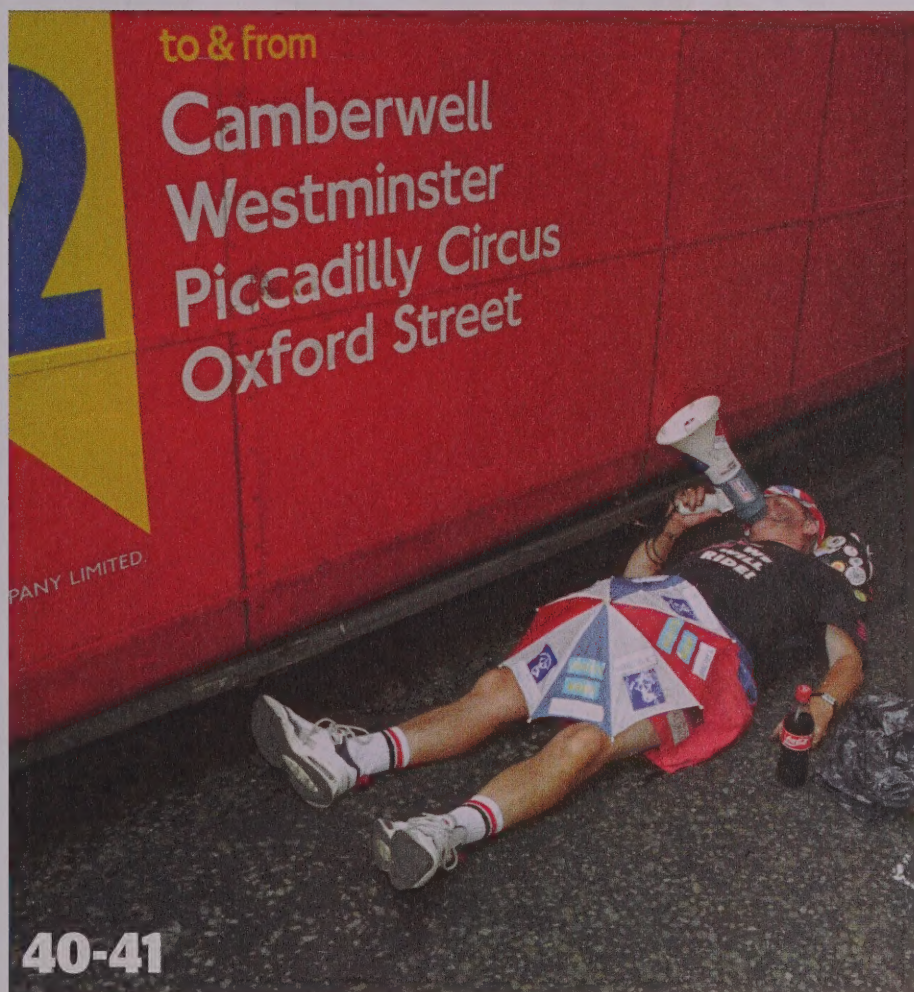
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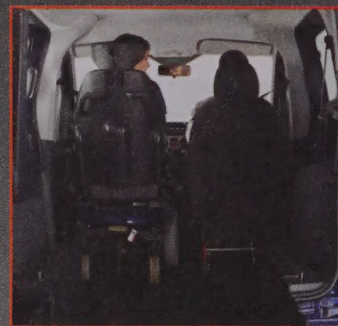
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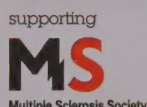
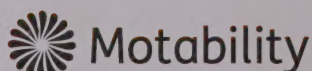
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Facing up to the realpolitik

It's not just individual disabled people who're feeling the bite of local and central government funding cuts. Chief Executive of United Kingdom's Disabled People's Council, Jaspal Dhani (pictured) tells **Ian Macrae** groups like his are also feeling the pinch



This is a tough time to be involved with a Disabled People's Organisation (DPO). Numbers of them have already gone to the wall and there's dark talk of others following them.

As CEO of the main umbrella group who formerly worked for a local disabled led local service provider in North London, Jaspal Dhani of the United Kingdom Disabled People's Council (UKDPC) is well placed to reflect on how the present parlous situation came about.

"The story really goes back to when DPOs that were funded by the local authority started losing that funding due to local authorities contracting or tendering those services out. That was the first real threat to emerge."

And there is another

historical element to the demise of DPOs which continues to be felt today. In addition to shortage of money, there's also a lack of what's known as capacity.

"Many DPOs have enjoyed long relationships with local authorities. They became rather complacent or comfortable with that relationship. Then with regard to local authority procurement processes, many DPOs found themselves somewhat short in terms of skills and resources to deliver or even bid for such contracts. So many DPOs found their funding cut by as much as 70 per cent which really made it inviable for them to continue operating on a full-time basis and they found themselves having to downsize. Then we were also hit by the financial crisis and that changed the →

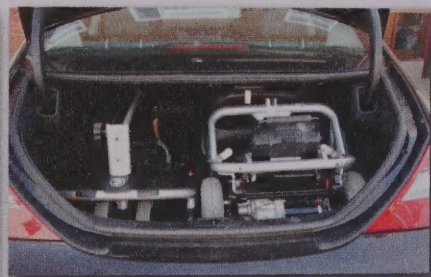
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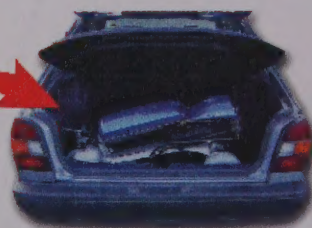


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landscape quite dramatically and many more DPOs continue to face threats of closure."

Thus was born the spiral whereby lack of skills meant loss of funding which in turn further reduced the capacity within individual organisations. And that has meant that local groups are no longer offering the sorts of essential services the disabled people who had used them had relied on.

"You're seeing a breakdown of the community," asserts Dhani. "With DPOs closing, disabled people who were in employment become out of work, and that goes against the Government's stated ambition to get people into work and keep them in work. In addition to that many disabled people are losing essential services in the community. Many of the replacements for those services which were delivered by DPOs, such as information or advice, advocacy or counselling, are not accessible."

It also means, says Dhani, that at the very time when disabled people's voices need to be loudest and most heard, this lack of capacity among DPOs means that's not able to happen.

"There's a capacity issue on all fronts really. DPOs that are still in existence are

struggling as we saw with the Hardest Hit campaign. Many organisations that wanted to take part simply didn't have the time or resources to put into being there. And for UKDPC that really isn't any different. We are a campaigning and umbrella organisation and looking for funding is like trying to find a needle in a haystack. Yet the capacity building fund which was set up by the Office for Disability Issues (ODI) is underspent. If you look at the amount of money they've put out to the DPO sector as against the money available, they are not having to say we are running out of money.

"DPOs who are struggling need core funding, not project funding. And I think the ODI has got that wrong. While they are focussing on capacity building, when you look at the criteria they're using for awards, it is focussed on project work."

So in reality, what does this mean for a group which aims to challenge government by representing the voices of disabled people? "Well," says Dhani, "it makes an already difficult job even harder.

"UKDPC feels that we are having to work with a Government which is not listening to the disabled community. And there are



BRUCE ADAMS/ASSOCIATED NEWSPAPER/REX FEATURES

now voices within the disabled community. There are now emerging viewpoints that organisations and networks of disabled people should withdraw from dialogues with the Government. But UKDPC has for the past 12 months felt that the opportunities which were being created by the Government and by the Minister for Disabled People were really designed to support their own ambitions and agenda. But from our point of view, there's been very little evidence to show that Maria Miller (*pictured*) is actively listening to the disabled community.

"UKDPC hasn't pulled out from such dialogue, but we

will not be hoodwinked or misled into thinking that this is going to be an easy dialogue or one that the Government is going to respond to. It's one of those areas where you're damned if you do and damned if you don't. If you're not at the table then the Government will continue to push its policy in a particular direction. If you are at the table, they just do that anyway. But at least we can then say that we did all that we could. We campaigned in the manner that was right for us and we raised the issues that were right for us. So we can proudly say we put up opposition and we were part of that dialogue."

newsupdate

Watchdogs challenged over legal aid probe

Sunil Peck

Regulators including the Charity Commission could face legal action as suspicions grow that they failed to investigate complaints about a paralegal company run by a disabled person.

In April, *Disability Now* reported on the case of a disabled woman, Rebecca Humphreys, who said that her discrimination case had been bungled by Carl Linden of Disability Claim Management (DCM) who had also cost her thousands of pounds and who had threatened her with court action.

Other disabled people have since approached *Disability Now* to say that DCM had demanded substantial sums in unpaid costs and threatened them with court after mishandling their discrimination cases.

Adam Lotun (pictured), a disabled activist who is suing DCM for money he claims the company owe him and who has been compiling a dossier of disabled people's experiences of the company, says that he is aware of around a dozen other disabled people



whose cases have followed a similar pattern.

"When court cases fail because of the way they are handled by DCM, there are additional claims for costs, threats of court action and in some cases, the appearance of bailiffs who force entry and remove disabled people's possessions."

Mr Lotun was being sued by DCM for thousands of

pounds of outstanding fees. But a judgement obtained at London County Court by Mr Linden was eventually set aside, partly on the basis that there was no evidence that Mr Linden had a license to practice litigation from the Ministry of Justice.

Chris Fry, a solicitor at Unity Law who acted for Mr Lotun, said that he had heard anecdotal

evidence that complaints had been made to public bodies.

He told *Disability Now* that he was now exploring the possibility of taking action against the Charity Commission in the event that it failed to investigate allegations of fraud or misconduct.

"If complaints have been made to the Charity Commission, we need to see evidence of those complaints, and we will ask the Commission as to what they did in respect of those complaints. If they didn't do anything at all and we can make the case that they unreasonably failed to act, we will expect the Commission to become responsible for any of the losses arising as a result of people having relied on DCM."

Mr Fry said that DCM's financial situation was unclear so he was not convinced that a case against DCM was the best way forward.

He added that he was also keen to hear from people who may have made complaints about the conduct of DCM to other public bodies.

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ruthpatrick

Cameron: actions at odds with ideology



While appearing to fly in the face of Thatcherism with his Big Society ideal, **Ruth Patrick** says that David Cameron's real agenda may be having unforeseen consequences

It is critical to engage with what remains the central – even only – ideological plank of David Cameron's leadership. Long ridiculed by the press, and failing to find meaning with the electorate.

Cameron's Big Society fantasy would feature boosted levels of volunteering and charitable giving, with power and control decentralised to the local level, and public services increasingly delivered by community and voluntary sector organisations.

Two years into this ConDem administration, a visible and growing Big Society gap is opening up between the rhetoric and supposed objectives of government policy and the actual impact of their zealous deficit-slashing, austerity-imposing regime. While Cameron and his cronies talked up the importance of giving to charity, they did not even have the humility to look red-faced as they

simultaneously planned to change the tax regime to remove fiscal incentives for charitable donations. While painting a future where public services are increasingly provided by voluntary sector organisations, the Government continues to tender for services in ways which sees the big juicy contracts going to large private sector organisations. This leaves big hitters such as the now-disgraced A4 and the infamous Atos Healthcare picking up the dosh, with charities left to scramble for what little scraps remain.

Most brazenly of all, while rhapsodising about the value and importance of both volunteering and the charitable sector as a whole, Cameron is overseeing a frightening reduction in funding for this very sector. Yes, they may be providing a rather tokenistic £600m through Big Society Capital – the much-hyped Big Society bank which will



redistribute dormant bank accounts as loans to social enterprises and charities. But this occurs alongside cuts which will see the voluntary and community sector lose £1.2bn every year for the remainder of this parliament. A report by False Economy found that some 2,000 charities have already had their funding cut or withdrawn altogether. At the grassroots level, charities are unsurprisingly losing faith with the Big Society promise.

What is more, as a recent audit by the think tank, Civic Exchange, argued, the Big Society may work – just about – in the leafy suburbs but it has almost no meaning or value in deprived communities where people

often have neither the time nor the resources to engage in the volunteering and community activities that the project is so determined to promote.

Nonetheless, there are some signs of a Big Society emerging across Britain if we understand this more broadly as Cameron's ambition for individuals to come together and take responsibility for the future of their country and the services on which we all rely. As cuts in services begin to be felt, more and more people are getting engaged; whether by protesting on the streets, joining UK Uncut and similar direct action groups, or participating in sit-ins in local libraries threatened with closure.

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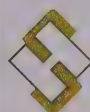
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THE LATE GRAHAM BOOL

As one of only a very few peers who are also multi-gold-medal-winning athletes, **Baroness [Tanni] Grey-Thompson** (pictured, centre) decided to bring her sporting prowess and political influence to bear to engage the wider public in the debate on welfare reform

The Welfare Reform Bill that passed through the Lords in the last Parliament, was long, complex, and as everyone agreed, will probably represent the biggest reform to welfare since its inception.

It would be hard to argue that the system did not need reform.

I thought I knew a reasonable amount about disability benefits before I went to work on the Bill but I was to learn a whole lot more

in the weeks and months that I worked on it in the House of Lords and beyond.

The idea of universal credit may make sense at least from a philosophical point of view, but in reality it is never going to be that easy in practice. I spent a reasonable amount of time during the debates on transferring people from Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to the new Personal Independence Payment (PIP) trying to explain to them what DLA actually was, and what it was used for.

There are several common misapprehensions. First, many people are under the impression that it is an out of work benefit, and secondly, people think that it is a much bigger amount of money than it really is.

The fact that disabled people use DLA for so many different things makes it hard for some people outside the system to understand. I tried to break it down to something really simple. I don't particularly want DLA to exist, but while society is still relatively inaccessible it is

important to have it. In essence it buys off disabled people from complaining too much more about how inequitable things still are. So, cheap at twice the price you might think.

But still the persuasion and discussion has to go on about how important it is. That is before we get on to what the new scheme is going to look like. Figures I have seen suggest that somewhere between 500,000 and 650,000 people will lose out in the new system. I have no

doubt that there is some element of error in who it is awarded to, but I don't believe that error is anywhere near as large as this figure would suggest.

So in my attempt to keep up the pressure I thought that I would explain DLA in terms that the wider population might be more interested in.

If lots of disabled people lose DLA, then it will be harder for them to work. That means it will also be harder for them to access education and also sport and physical activity. It

“In my attempt to keep up the pressure I thought that I would explain DLA in terms that the wider population might be more interested in”

therefore follows that there is likely to be a slippery slope with levels of health and fitness falling and further consequences following on for everything associated with it.

Physical activity for disabled people is so important, but it is something that often gets ignored as having low priority, or worse. Plus there is still exclusion, discrimination, and barriers for disabled people who want to get involved.

This all means that there could be a situation where this does affect the number of people who are able to access sport at the grass roots level, who might then progress to elite competition. This in turn could lead directly to a decline in

numbers of people who have the ability and motivation to compete at the highest level, resulting in a threat to success and achievement in Paralympic sport beyond London 2012.

This argument gained some traction from people on the outside of disability rights and activism. But still there is not enough knowledge of the changes in welfare reform, nor enough thought being given to the likely impact it is going to have, and there is still a lot of work to be done to get the message across.

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mediawatch

Disability media: a mixed picture

As disability arts organisation Shape hosts an event about disabled people and the media, and with Channel 4 offering blanket coverage of the 2012 Paralympic Games, **Ian Macrae** finds out what three disabled people in the media think about where we are and where we've been in respect of representation

Damon Rose

Editor, BBC, *Ouch!*



I feel we've turned a corner and that disability matters and human differences are

important and interesting to schedulers and viewers alike. There are more disabled people telling their stories in a manner that has definitely improved, so disability is being talked about fairly well. The fear factor has gone and programme makers no longer avoid disability in case they get it wrong and hurt us.

What we're missing is a

diversity of subjects. Too many programmes still promote the condescending idea that "we don't consider ourselves disabled" or "we don't let it get us down" and this continues to grate. I understand the sentiment but it's a lazy shorthand for something that isn't being discussed properly.

I still believe that *Blue Peter* got it wrong when it chose to inspire its eight-year-old audience by introducing them to a 64-year-old man with cerebral palsy

called Joey Deacon. His name, and the word spastic, dogged disabled people for years and caused playground trauma. I badly want to see good disability role models, and I still haven't found a show that speaks to me and my identity.

We must also avoid making the mistake of confusing shows about disabled people with shows that cater for disabled viewers. Often shows about disability are the last things that disabled viewers want to watch.

Kate Monaghan

TV Producer, Mark Three Media



I think that disabled people are getting a lot of airtime at the moment, which is great! And I think that the portrayal of disabled

people is improving. Channel 4's getting the Paralympics has given disability a real boost. It has made TV people sit up and think about disability and how they are covering it and how we should be represented.

But there is still too much sensationalism.

The Undateables is a great example of this. The programme itself was OK – not brilliant, but OK. It was

important to get people thinking differently about disability and love and indeed sex. However, the publicity that Channel 4 put out about it was very ill-judged and, for me, ruined the good work that the programme was trying to do.

We need more disabled people behind the cameras and leading the programmes. We know how to cover this stuff best and we need more disabled people responsible for commissioning and exec-ing programmes.

We are much further along than we were with the

"shock docs". And we've had quite a period where we haven't seen disability represented much.

This resurgence in disability on TV is positive: we are still far from where we need to be, but we are moving in the right direction.

The best examples are where disabled people are seen as part of a story, just like anyone else. There doesn't need to be anything special about them, just as long as they are included, like Izzy Armstrong on *Coronation Street*.

Tony Heaton

Chief Executive, Shape



When presenters talk about the Olympics they're now likely to mention the Paralympics in the same breath and it doesn't sound like an

afterthought. I like that.

What I don't like is all the sensationalist stuff and I despair at the misinformation coming out of the Government and Iain Duncan Smith about benefit scroungers and the need to cut disabled people's benefits.

The Government should provide some honest information about benefit costs and cuts, and journalists should look

beyond the propaganda to really understand the issues.

We are still faced with a press that writes about disability from a "tragic but brave" perspective.

I'm also concerned that media reporters seem to have no deeper understanding of the issues. The only solution is to have more disabled people as journalists and presenters.

I think there were many

more disabled people on TV 15 years ago. I also think that magazine-style programmes gave real coverage of a wide range of issues and topics. I am not sure that there is much today that informs so well.

Telethon must be up there as the worst type of programming; the best are the programmes about disability presented by disabled people.

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politics



Parliament and the job share option

It's argued that the long parliamentary hours and physical demands on MPs work against disabled people standing for election. But, as **Sunil Peck** reports, people are asking whether job share might be the answer

Deborah King's condition prevents her from working the long hours MPs traditionally work. So she tried to stand as an independent candidate in Uxbridge in the 2010 general election on a job share basis.

"The electoral registration officer checked with the electoral commission and I was told that I couldn't stand as a job share MP

because the law only allows one person per constituency to be elected."

A committee of MPs, the Speaker's Conference, has put forward recommendations for increasing the representation of groups including disabled people in Parliament. In their submissions to the committee, the Liberal Democrat Campaign for Gender Balance and the

Fabian Women's Network expressed their support for job sharing MPs. King says that a feasibility study was requested, but the Conference did not order the study and instead discussed the issue behind closed doors.

Undeterred, King, a member of Disability Politics UK, which campaigns to boost the numbers of disabled people involved in

political life, is urging disabled people to back a campaign for a change in the existing legislation which she hopes will lead to the election of more disabled people to the Commons.

The campaign is supported by politicians including the leader of the Green Party Caroline Lucas, the president of the Liberal Democrats Tim Farron and the Labour MP for Hayes and Harlington, John McDonnell.

As *Disability Now* went to press, McDonnell was appealing for disabled people interested in standing for Parliament on a job share basis to contact him as part of an evidence-gathering exercise for a bill he was preparing for Parliament.

According to King, a change in the electoral system would increase the political influence of disabled people.

"At the moment we have legislation being made about disabled people without us so it breaks the disability rights rule of 'nothing about us without us'. So in terms of the difference that it would make, I think that more disabled people in Parliament would give effect to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Convention creates the right to work on the same basis as non-disabled people and I think that we would be able

to create a better labour market for all disabled people if we had more disabled MPs. There hasn't been enough consultation with small and medium-size enterprises to encourage them to take on more disabled employees."

Does King think that more disabled MPs on job shares would have led to a different outcome for the Remploy factories which are set to close?

"I don't think the closures would be taking place. You wouldn't choose to close down a factory in a recession

when the employees want to keep the factory open. Where are those disabled people going to find jobs? We're at the bottom of the pile when it comes to jobs."

Practical issues, like voting and speaking in Parliament would, according to King, not pose problems for job sharing MPs either.

"With voting, the vast majority of votes are taken on the basis of whips or party manifesto commitments. So there would be no difference between job sharing MPs.

"Prospective job sharing

MPs would work out in advance how they would resolve these differences if they occurred and let people know they had arrangements in place for resolving differences of opinion.

"With speaking, there is sometimes a time restriction placed on speaking in the Commons. If there were to be a time limit on debates set by the Speaker, then the job shares could use half the

time each. Often Commons debates are not very full and so if there was a need for both job shares to speak, say they both had expert knowledge which was relevant, then there appears to be no reason why they could not both speak as long as they were concise and stuck to the time limit."

• To see John McDonnell's video, visit youtube.com/watch?v=XjVNuoHvDqI

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worldview

Bollywood: fantasy and reality

Psychologist, academic, feminist, disability activist and film buff
Dr Anita Ghai radiates love of her subject when she talks about disability and sexuality in Bollywood. As befits this melodramatic genre her love affair with Bollywood has its share of frustrations and disappointments as well as moments of bliss



KELLY MULLAN

Five songs, three fight scenes, two tear-jerker moments and a couple of comic scenes; this is the “Masala” formula of mechanical Bollywood cinema (or rather DVD as access is not there for cinemas).

Films are a reflection of society and ideologies are inherent in film and TV. Disabled people are marginalised in Hindi society and are marginalised in Hindi film. As an activist I want to change this as it influences attitudes.

Paradoxically, disability is highly visible but not explored. There’s no recognition of the human potential of disabled people.

Disabled film extras are used to evoke emotional reactions: for example, a fleeting scene of a crippled beggar leaning into the star’s car, or the star helping a blind person across the road.

Images of disability are deep rooted in culture and social anxiety about the human body.

It’s a defence to think: “It’s someone else’s problem.” And people don’t want to get into thinking mode at the cinema.

Bollywood films are fantasies of perfection about beauty and macho images but disability has its place. Any actor playing a disabled character overcoming adversity wins an award.

Typically if the star marries a beautiful blind girl, she’ll be cured by the end. In another plot the amputee feels he must leave the beautiful girl: she then tries to get her leg cut off to be with him. Then there’s the cultural stereotype of the bad guy with the eyepatch. And speech problems are exploited for comic effect so there are issues of laughter and power.

Black, a Bollywood film based on the Helen Keller story, is really problematic for me. Many disabled people had an enthusiastic response and there are parts which touch on my experience but mostly I hated it. The deafblind student asks her teacher for

a kiss, he can’t handle this and leaves, and she sadly concludes “maybe I’ve asked too much from life”. How is asking for a kiss asking too much from life?

There is so much silence about sexuality and disability that you end up silencing yourself. Up to the age of 28 I did not allow myself any of the emotions related to my sex life – because I knew this was not allowed.

I see this repression a lot through my work researching relationships between mothers and their disabled daughters. It’s fascinating. The repression: don’t think about it! This is why I love the psychoanalytical.

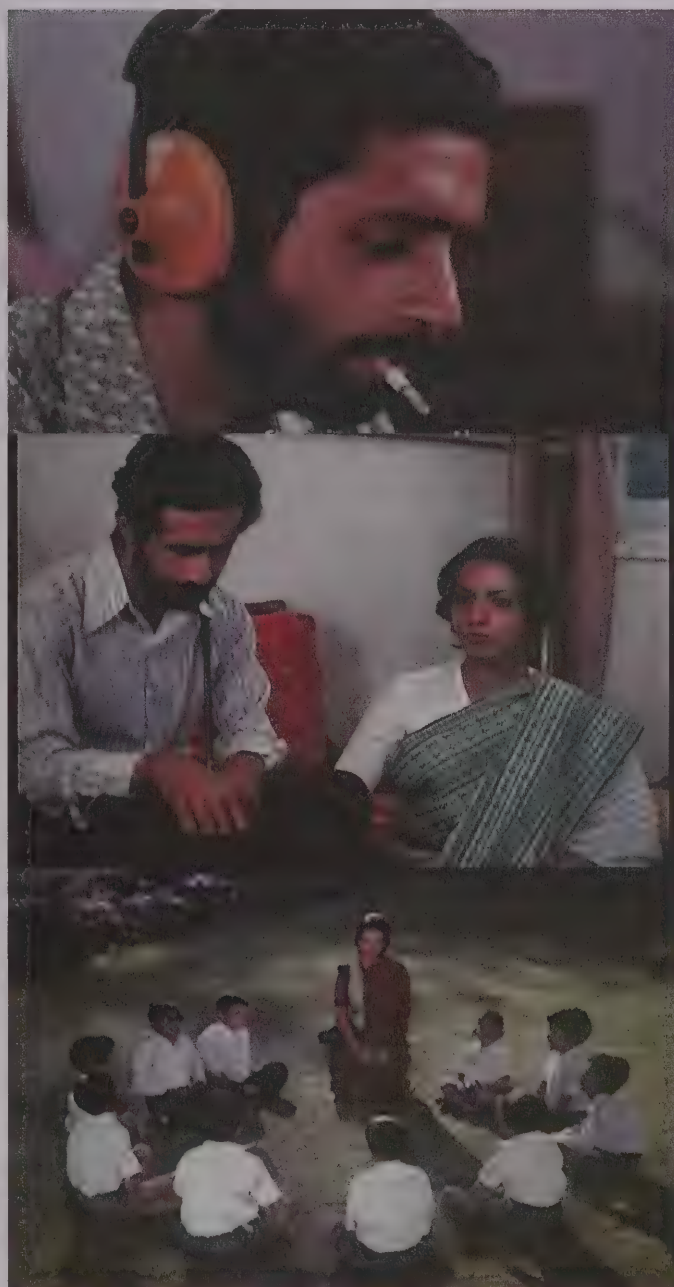
In India’s patriarchal society,

it is worse to be a disabled woman than a disabled man. Arranged marriages are very important. Sexuality is tied to marriage and marriage is not accessible. There are clear gender differences. A disabled man can marry a poor woman.

In *Sparsh* (pictured right), the drama is set in a blind school. It's about the relationship between the blind principal and a widow. (Widow remarriage is difficult.) The actress says "my life is meaningful now I am with you" and refers to "doing my duty". So marrying a disabled person is doing your duty? That's enough to put an arrow through anyone's heart!

Disabled people are often infantilised into adulthood so parents make their kids a burden as they don't give them opportunities. I see parents who give love and support but not autonomy.

Paa is a film about a disabled child and his relationship with his mother and his father. There is a lot of mother blaming in India which pains me. The mother is blamed if the child is a girl or if the child is disabled. I've heard of a mother-in-law who refused to even visit her daughter-in-law when she had a third daughter. A disabled daughter is an even greater curse. There is prenatal selection with abortion allowed for disabled fetuses.



Mothers want hysterectomies for disabled daughters for fear of pregnancy. They have no confidence of protecting their daughters from abuse and the hysterectomies are, it seems to me, a way of

legitimising abuse. In a slum a mother would not let her daughter be taken to an institution even though she was being abused by her father. She justified her decision by saying: "At least here she is only abused by

one person."

Class is very important in Indian society. The majority of disabled women are in extreme poverty. Better off disabled people have the resources but sometimes wealthier mothers will hide their disabled child because of prestige.

In *Sixth Happiness* the mother takes her son to his father's workplace and his colleagues are surprised because he has never mentioned him. *Sixth Happiness* is a wonderful autobiographical film and includes a bisexual love triangle. It was made in London. It would never have been made in Bollywood.

Sixth Happiness has a disabled star but there aren't any disabled performers in Bollywood. The problem comes from not realising that disabled people are capable.

Of 30 million disabled children only seven per cent are in education. There are reserved places for disabled students in universities but this is only a slogan. We've only recently been allowed to join the civil service although thank God I wasn't allowed to become a civil servant when I wanted to apply!

• Dr Anita Ghai was talking to Kelly Mullan at a trailblazer event for DaDaFest (Disability and Deaf Arts) in Liverpool.

one2watch

Cueing up for success

Doncaster's very own hustler **Matt Lester** recently sealed a sponsorship deal with Cue King Promotions. He says that people who patronise him make him angry, and admits enjoying having the balls to take people on for money



What made you want to become a pool player?

Snooker was always my favourite sport. As I've got older I've wanted to take it more seriously. Playing on the British Wheelchair Pool tour gives me the chance to represent Great Britain and earn prize money, which is very appealing!

What's the hardest or most spectacular shot you've ever pulled off?

Playing from a seated position with just one hand, I find shots when I'm bridging over a ball to get to the white very difficult because my eye line is blocked, but all match-winning shots or clearances are great!

What do you enjoy most about playing pool?

It's handy when you're in a

bar and there's a table, when you're strapped for cash and you offer a game for a pint, or maybe even a fiver or a tenner. When they see I'm in a wheelchair and play one handed they think they'll take it easy on me, but once they see I can play, they can't believe it. I've also become friends with some of my childhood heroes which is just surreal!

And what do you like least about it?

Nothing, really, except perhaps the financial side. Cue King Promotions act as my agent so if there's anyone out there wanting to work in partnership and help sponsor me, please contact them.

How do non-disabled players react to you?

Most people are surprised when they see me play. A few times when I've been practising, people have felt awkward wanting to watch but I always encourage people to do so because at the end of the day I'm just a good player who happens to be in a wheelchair.

What makes you angry?

When I feel I haven't played my best. Plus, local councils, places that don't have wheelchair access, bar prices, David Cameron, and people who patronise disabled people.

How would you make life better for disabled people, if you were PM?

Prime Minister would be a daunting task! In a perfect world, I'd make every public



building wheelchair accessible and make the housing system easier for disabled people by requiring every council-owned property to have flat access and wide doors, especially with my driving!

Who's your favourite disabled person ever?

Ian Dury and Tanni Grey-Thompson. As a sporting person, what Tanni's done is nothing short of inspirational. I admire any disabled person who gets up and tries to follow their ambition.

How would you sum yourself up in ten words or fewer?

Determined, motivated, a winner, helpful, approachable, heart of a lion.

Do you have any secret skills or talent?

When I was younger I used to play boccia and represented Yorkshire at boccia and athletics.

• Find out more and follow Matt's career at matthewlester.com

→ Who do you think is One to Watch?

Send us your nominations for likely lads and lasses who could answer our 10 questions. They can be rising stars in any field of entertainment, business, the media or beyond

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Lost voice guy

Talking the talk

What Stephen Hawking has done for quantum physics, Lee Ridley is aiming to do for stand-up and for disability. **Annie Makoff** meets the man for whom an iPad is an essential part of his act



He panic buys pasties, he likes to pretend he's an answering machine and he obsessively tracks mentions of himself in the media.

Lee Ridley or Lost Voice Guy as he is more commonly known, is not your typical stand-up comedian. For a start, he can't speak.

"When I realised I would never speak

again, I was speechless", the po-faced stand-up tells his audience. There are howls of laughter and Lee, speaking through his iPad continues. "I've looked everywhere for it: down the



back of the chair and behind the washing machine. But on the bright side, I did find the television remote control, £3 in change and a used condom."

The 31-year-old Geordie is relatively new to stand-up. Not that you'd know it. Having performed at over 20 venues across the UK since February 2012, the London gig which *Disability Now* attended in April was seemingly a doddle for the budding comedian.

Lee was born with cerebral palsy which has affected his balance and walking ("I walk like I'm drunk") and he uses a communication aid to speak.

Having trained as a journalist several years ago, Lee began writing for pleasure (and laughs) as well as for business. He reviewed local bands, went out to gigs and submitted hundreds of articles to the local media.

But it was his blog which he wrote with tongue-in-cheek humour that would ultimately lead him to a new career in comedy.

"I've always enjoyed making people laugh," he explains "and being a stand-up was my dream job. But I always thought it was just a dream – I never thought I'd actually do it."

I've been told I'm a role model and an inspiration, but I'm really not a fan of those terms. I'm just a bloke telling jokes on a stage

Yet barely a year later, Lee has appeared on the BBC, Sky, CNN, Radio 4, Radio 5 and has had countless articles about him in national newspapers. People are clearly fascinated with his calling, which, let's face it, is a strange choice for someone who can't speak for toffee.

"My inability to speak was always going to be part of the act," he concedes. "It defines me whether I like it or not. I can either play on it or

ignore it completely. I like to think it helps me get away with a lot."

Like his comments about disabled people using their benefit money to buy iPads? "Yes, exactly that."

In fact, one of his opening lines draws attention to what the audience assumes is about his disability but then does the exact opposite. "Let's deal with the elephant in the room," he begins. "I know what you were thinking when I walked up on stage. It's OK, it happens all the time. Here comes another wanker with his iPad." An iPad, which he jests, was bought using his DLA.

It's a joke that won't be lost on any disabled person today. "Scroungers" and "benefit cheats" are both terms that the media have often used to describe disabled people – which Lee uses as part of his act – not just for laughs, but to make an important political point.

"I guess it's about having a point to prove," says Lee. "I want people to realise that us disabled do actually have a sense of humour. At the same time, I want people to see us in a positive light: we don't go round stealing benefits off the state."

Not many would have imagined it would have been possible to pull off an impressive stand-up routine without speech. But Lee, ever practical, delightedly tells of how he spent just £1.49 on an iPad app which reads out his script. The voice which he describes as a "quintessentially English storybook voice" may sound "a bit posh", but he believes it makes the act even funnier.

Even the issue of spontaneity (something you'd consider essential in a comedian) doesn't infringe on his performance.

"It's trial and error really. I'm still





I want people to realise that us disabled do actually have a sense of humour. At the same time, I want people to see us in a positive light: we don't go round stealing benefits off the state

Lee recalls one of his most successful jokes which involved a deaf-blind man on a train who had asked Lee to give up his seat. Lee attempts to use his communication aid to respond with: "I wasn't aware we were playing disabled top trumps" but because the man can neither hear nor see, the stand-off continues for some time.

Lee's act may be unique, but he's conscious of not wanting to stereotype himself, nor to become "like one of those comedians who just concentrate on their race or size." But at the moment, getting laughs out of disability politics is a useful taboo to start with.

"Without my disability I wouldn't have an act. All of a sudden, I don't want to be cured – how convenient, right? I think it's better to embrace my disability – the good and the bad – and let people see what it's like. Eventually, I want to move on to do other stuff, not disability related."

But as far as Lee is concerned, the Government, in appearing to stigmatise disabled people, have actually done him a huge favour: "Their attitude is really helpful for someone like me. It means I can take the piss out of what they're doing. Well done, Dave!"

But for all his jokes, Lee wants his stand-up to help dispel the state-endorsed myth which demonises disabled people by labelling them as

getting used to when to pause to allow for laughter, even though of course, every audience is different. And I do have some good comebacks stored just in case I get heckled, which hasn't happened yet, but I'm sure it will. But I think the long pauses while I type out a response will make it even funnier. Like slow motion comedy. Almost."

And what has been the reaction so far to his performances? Does he think

people laugh because they should, because they are embarrassed, or because he's a genuinely funny guy? But Lee, who so far hasn't had any bad experiences, isn't too fussed as to the psychology behind the audience's reactions.

"I've been told I'm a role model and an inspiration, but I'm really not a fan of those terms. I'm just a bloke telling jokes on a stage."

cheats and scroungers. "Although it seems that petrol and pasties are more important to the media, anyway," he muses, before freely admitting to panic buying pasties, such is his love for them. "You can't go round taxing pasties!"

Lee's new-found talent on the stage has enabled him to take the seemingly ridiculous responses to his disability and turn them into something to laugh at. Nearly every disabled person will have at least one or two anecdotes where people have asked them odd questions or reacted to them in an odd way, and Lee's experiences are no exception.

"My everyday communication aid sounds a bit like Steven Hawking, so I can really synthesise with him," he jokes. "But sadly, on the telephone, it's



caused a few problems. People don't believe they are talking to a real person, even though I try and engage them in conversation, but they do leave their name and number..."

Naturally, Lee plays along, asking them for all kinds of personal bank

details or intoning for them to speak more slowly.

"But it's great if I don't want to speak to them anyway. I can then pretend I am an answer phone, and they are none the wiser."

So what's next for Lost Voice Guy? He's toured all over the UK, from Aberdeen to London, his blog, lostvoiceguy.com is receiving over 300 hits a month and he's been in the media "more than Princess Di".

"Now I want everyone to buy a T-shirt," he says. "A Lost Voice Guy T-shirt. And after that, who knows? Maybe I'll one day tour with Ross Noble – my all-time favourite comedian. Actually, that would be amazing. I'd love that."

Maybe he will. But he better stock up on the pasties first. ■

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Hoping for a sporting chance





They were traditionally seen as coming after the main event, a bit of a sideshow. But now, with disabled athletes attracting major sponsorship, as well as the serious attention of sports media, the 2012 Paralympic Games are being given almost equal billing. But what sporting and other benefits is this likely to bring to disabled people in Britain once the show has left town? **Paul Carter** reports

With the Paralympics now almost upon us, disability and coverage of elite disability sport is about to hit an unprecedented level. With Channel 4 screening over 150 hours of Games coverage, and a raft of associated programming around disability, we find ourselves in a position where disabled people are going to be in the public eye at a greater level than we have ever seen before.

You may think that praise and support for this position is universal and unequivocal. However, many leading figures believe that the current climate around attitudes to disabled people in wider society, and government reforms to welfare and social care programmes threaten to destroy any positive legacy that the Paralympics may bring to the UK, and that more needs to be done to ensure a positive outcome for all disabled people.

The debate was sparked last month, when Baroness (Tanni) Grey-Thompson DBE, Britain's most successful ever Paralympian and a member of the House of Lords warned that benefit cuts were threatening the ability of some athletes to continue competing. It's an argument she puts in this issue of *Disability Now*.

Writing earlier in *The Guardian* newspaper she said: "It's important to recognise that the cuts will affect Paralympians, who have higher living costs as a result of their impairment.

"I know someone who is on the edge of qualification who has had her DLA removed. It impacts on her ability to get involved in society, not just sport."

Disability organisations, athletes and governing bodies have all been quick to play up the positive benefits of the Paralympics rather than focus on negatives.

In fact, many current competing



athletes that *Disability Now* spoke to were reluctant to go on record with their opinions about the present negative climate around disability because of concern over their own position.

Most however, were positive regarding the legacy benefits deriving from the Games, and the way organisers have embraced societal change as a key driving factor behind the ethos of the 2012 Paralympics.

Liz Sayce, chief executive of Disability Rights UK, warns that the Paralympics should be seen as a springboard for improving the lives of disabled people, rather than being seen as a sinecure in their own right.

She says: "The Paralympics could be a real opportunity, a great platform for showing what disabled people can achieve and contribute to society. But it's not a panacea. Attitudes towards disability are hardening."

Liz Johnson, a swimmer who won gold in the 2008 Paralympics in Beijing said, however, that the way the Games were being presented would help reflect positive attitudes back on disabled people more generally.

She says: "Every four years the Paralympics gets more professional, there's more coverage and I think one of the reasons the London 2012 bid did so well was because they put equal focus on the Paralympics and that legacy."

"The fact that one of the world's biggest bands, Coldplay, will be playing at the Paralympic closing ceremony is in itself a sign of the increasing stature that the Games have. LOCOG have done a really good job in making sure the quality of acts and resources for the Paralympics is on a par with the Olympics rather than just being whatever is left.

"They want to market the Paralympics in their own right."

Her views are echoed by Sir Philip

Craven, the president of the International Paralympic Committee, the body responsible for governing Paralympic sport globally. He himself is a wheelchair-user and former Paralympic athlete.

"The long term objective is to remove the word 'disability' from the lexicon," he says.

I know someone who has had her DLA removed. It impacts on her ability to get involved in society, not just sport

"The biggest difficulty I have faced is coming up against people who assume you're stupid because you're sitting down. It happens all over the world and it does still happen in Britain. People's ideas change when they come and see the Games. Once they see Paralympic sport they are amazed and inspired – if that person can play sport they can do anything else. I hope the Games will contribute towards changing perceptions. But there is still an awful lot of work to do."

Perhaps the biggest concern among people and organisations that *Disability Now* spoke to was not to do with changes in society, but whether the much talked about legacy opportunities would actually filter down to grass roots level, and prove to be a benefit for disabled Londoners who aren't elite athletes or members of clubs.

Geraint Richards, who is head of performance for Great Britain Wheelchair Tennis said that the biggest shift he was hoping for from the Games this summer would be that they "open the eyes not only of the public but of local authorities".

With local budgets and services being either squeezed or cut

completely, access to sporting facilities is being reduced. With disabled people traditionally facing increased barriers in this area, the problem is magnified.

"The big beauty of wheelchair tennis is that you don't have to play against other wheelchair players. I'd like to see every tennis club in the country open its doors to disabled players... It's the most inclusive sport around and there's no reason why existing facilities can't be opened up to wheelchairs," says Geraint.

However, Sport England has just announced an £8m legacy investment fund to increase sporting opportunities for disabled people following the Games.

Jennie Price, Sport England's chief executive said it is an "uncomfortable truth" that disabled people enjoy fewer opportunities to get involved in sport.

"The Paralympic Games will put the sporting achievements of disabled people in the spotlight as never before. I want to make sure that Sport England's £8m lottery investment is a catalyst to help more disabled people get involved," she said.

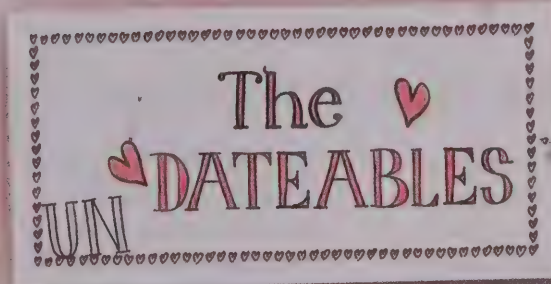
Wheelchair basketball player Mandip Sehmi said that the Games provided an opportunity to show the wider, non-disabled public that disabled people were capable of achieving great things and being a success on the world stage on an equal level with non-disabled athletes.

"Yeah, it's all about educating people. So many people don't realise how hard we work to achieve peak fitness at the highest levels the same as able-bodied athletes. I guess the Games being in London we have an opportunity to do this.

"I guess it's our opportunity to leave our mark in history. We won't compete in a 'home games' in our lifetimes ever again so it is a once in a lifetime opportunity to be part of something so special," he says. ■

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yourviews

Don't park your prejudice in my space

I find the image and the statement at the start of your Baywatch article last month incautious, offensive and uninformed ("Baywatch! Back on patrol", *Disability Now*, June 2012).

I am 33 years old and run a carpentry business with a van and an employee. I also have Parkinson's and take powerful medication to suppress my symptoms. When it works, I appear to be perfectly able-bodied

but as you and your readers may know, Parkinson's sufferers have a habit of switching into "off" mode (a Parkinson's term). In my own case, I can be left virtually stranded and unable to walk.

For example, I'm perfectly capable of pulling up in my van at a disabled bay, jumping out and sprinting into a shop. If you saw me, you'd be immediately suspicious!

But while I'm in the shop, I'm quite able to get into "off" mode and struggle to get back to my van. When that happens, I look very disabled indeed.

Your article, together with the image that you've used to accompany it (see *below*), suggests that the person driving the commercial van shown in your photograph is not disabled. So sure are you of this that you've even made it possible for readers to identify the vehicle by its numberplate X952 KBO), while whitening out the numberplate of the car parked alongside it.

More to the point, your article suggests that the disabled are unable to work or operate in any of the normal ways that are open to the population at large.

That is a huge assumption to make. In assuming that the person driving the van shown in your photograph is not disabled, you are taking the same judgmental stance that the general public tend to make.

As a member of a disability group, I am also curious to know how one of your "trained" investigators would manage to identify me as disabled. People usually can't. Please explain.
Paul Corcoran, by email

Go online only, at your peril

In the editorial in the May 2012 issue you announced that *Disability Now* will no longer be available in print from the end of September and will only be readable on the web.

You conclude that more people will access it online. I won't. I don't have a broadband connection and I don't envisage ever paying for one, as it does not fit into my budget.

For me, access to email is vital but sporadic, and depends on my using the neighbourhood library, where I can send and read emails but can't log on for long enough to read a magazine.

I don't think this is only a problem for me. A lot of disabled people are in this situation. What you are doing is tantamount to limiting access to the better off and cutting off access from a class of disabled people for whom broadband connectivity remains an unaffordable luxury.

In doing so, you are diminishing the credibility and representativeness of this publication. That is a pity.

(Dr) Ephraim Nissan, by email

livingnow

helendolphin

Baywatch! Back on patrol



without a badge at all. This is more common in supermarkets where abusers feel confident that nothing will happen if they park up in a disabled bay. To monitor how bad this type of abuse is we really need your help.

Every few years *Disability Now* and the charity Disabled Motoring UK join forces to carry out a Baywatch survey which aims to find out if supermarkets are doing anything to stop this kind of abuse. The main reason for doing the survey is to show supermarkets – particularly the 'big names' such as Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda and Morrisons that parking abuse is a real problem for disabled people and to try and get them to tackle the issue.

When the Baywatch campaign was first launched in 2002 not one supermarket was committed to ensuring that accessible bays were not abused. The first survey revealed that one in four disabled bays at supermarkets were being abused, but it wasn't until 2007 that Asda became the first supermarket to implement fining for disabled bay abusers. The number of people abusing disabled bays has reduced slightly since the first survey in 2002 and we believe this is because Asda,



Yes, it's back. Baywatch, the campaign that aims to stamp out Blue Badge bay abuse. And Helen Dolphin is asking for your help

Regular readers of *Disability Now* will know that one of my bugbears is abuse of disabled parking bays. Be it abuse by people using other people's badges, dead people's badges, forged badges, fake badges or no badge at all it makes me really cross. Although many

people view this as an insignificant crime that just deprives a local authority of a bit of parking revenue it actually stops disabled people from being able to access shops and wherever else they may need to go.

Most of these types of abuse are hard to spot unless you're a trained Blue

Badge fraud investigator. I can have my suspicions when I see a man in a gym kit parking in a disabled bay with a Blue Badge before sprinting out of his car into the supermarket but I can't do anything about it. However, the one type of bay abuse that is easy to spot is people parking

Will you still feed me, when I'm sixty-four?

Like Susan Downes ("Questions & Answers", *Disability Now*, June 2012), I am concerned about what will happen to my DLA under the new welfare legislation and whether I will be eligible to transfer to the PIP.

I am also in my early 60s and worked all my life until taking medical retirement at the age of 55. I have a permanent disability and have been receiving DLA

since the 1990s. I rely on this to provide a Motability car and support for my care.

I will be under the cut-off age of 64 years when the new Welfare Act comes into force in April 2013 which would entitle me to apply for transfer to PIP. However, I don't imagine that I will be at the front of the queue when PIP assessments are carried out. Any assessment is more likely to be delayed

until after 2015 when I will be 65 years old.

The legislation is contradictory in that it provides for PIP assessments only for those under 64, which leaves me in limbo. Am I or am I not in the category of persons eligible to transfer from DLA across to PIP?

I have asked my MP to take this up with the DWP and provide confirmation of my position. This has not

been forthcoming and I am left wondering whether the bill was badly drafted with no transitional provisions and whether the implications of this legislation have been thought through.

Am I being unreasonable in asking for a straightforward response to the question of what will happen to me?

Brenda Hawkyard, by email



The quality of mercy is indeed strained

It was disappointing and alarming to read Margaret Ashcroft's letter regarding her legal action against a university that she claimed had discriminated against her ("Your Views", *Disability Now*, June 2012).

Although I applaud her attempt at gaining justice for herself, it has brought her a horrifying outcome. She now has to sell the home she'd lived in for 30

years to pay the costs.

At Darlington Association on Disability (DAD) we have successfully supported disabled people, some of them students, in disability discrimination cases but we have never done this alone. Once you get past the initial complaint and go down the route of litigation, you are getting into a complex area that requires expert solicitors and

barristers, not least because expensive legal experts will certainly be representing the defendant.

The worst thing you can do is to find that you're less well represented than the organisation you're suing.

To protect their interests, potential litigants must look at the track record of any law firm before appointing it. DAD works with Unity Law, which specialises in disability discrimination, but there are many others.

The cases we have been involved with are taken on a "no-win, no-fee" basis. For disabled people who have experienced the unpleasant business of finding them-

selves discriminated against, "no-win, no-fee" gives peace of mind about costs as well as the possibility of an improved quality of life, rather than a worsening of it, as in Ms Ashcroft's case.

Disabled people should not be put off taking legal action if they have been discriminated against but they should always get representation.

One thing to remember, though, is that being right doesn't always mean you'll win, especially if taking on the other side's legal team alone.

Gordon Pybus, Chair, Darlington Association on Disability

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No triumph no tragedy



In this Paralympic year, **Professor Mike Oliver** has a challenge for the nation's press to break the habit of a lifetime

In early 1964 I was contacted by a journalist from my local paper. As I had been a fairly well known sportsman before my accident, could he come and talk to me about my situation now I had been discharged from Stoke Mandeville Hospital. As a naive 18-year-old I readily agreed and some days later he came to see me and we spent a couple of hours chatting pleasantly.

I imagined that the local paper would run a short piece about me on its sports pages but when the local paper came out I was shocked to find that I was front page headlines. In his story I was pictured as this heroic young man struggling to overcome the appalling tragedy of breaking my neck and local readers were reliably informed that I was going to represent Great Britain in the Paralympics which were taking place in Tokyo later that year.

It didn't happen of course because, even then, disability sport was much

more competitive than that. The story was much more than embarrassing however because I didn't feel either heroic or tragic as I went about rebuilding my life. What's more neither my family nor friends saw me like that either and I was able to put the story behind me. Many years later I found out that these stories were known as TOTs (shorthand for triumph over tragedy stories) and that this was the standard way in which journalists were expected to report stories about disabled people.

They were very easy to spot and in the 1980s they were everywhere in the press and on the television. Police Constable Philip Olds became the poster boy for these TOTs. Shot while trying to stop a robbery on Christmas Eve he took on the roles assigned to him with a vengeance, vowing not to be beaten by what had happened and promising the world he would walk again. He failed of course, and the only way

I was front page headlines... pictured as this heroic young man struggling to overcome the appalling tragedy of breaking my neck

he could cope with the switch from hero to victim was to blow his brains out with a shotgun. One disability activist writing at the time said he had been "pressed to death".

In the 1990s a new international poster boy appeared on the scene. Superman fell off his horse when out of uniform so even kryptonite could not save him from a life of paralysis. Christopher Reeve struggled against this by spending the rest of his life raising money for research to cure paralysis and in so doing he divided opinion amongst disabled people the world over. Some thought he was selflessly fighting to

bring hope to millions while others thought he was selfishly pursuing his own ends to be cured. Either way he died prematurely and missed out on the opportunity to live life to the full as a disabled person.

The latest person to become a TOT story for the media has been David Rathband. Blasted in the face with a shotgun while on duty he couldn't live with the heroic persona that had been created for him because, like all the rest of us, his personal life wasn't that simple. In the end he chose to take on the role of tragic victim permanently and killed himself.

These toxic representations are not just inaccurate for many of us but for some vulnerable disabled people they can be dangerous. The upcoming Paralympic Games will give journalists a great chance to kill off the TOT forever. Will they have the imagination and courage to take it?

→ Have your say

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- email us editor@disabilitynow.org.uk
- phone us **020 7619 7323**

questions&answers

you ask, they answer

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Psychologist with psychosexual therapy experience

Legal DOUGLAS JOY

Senior solicitor at the Disability Law Service

Benefits and Debt KEN BUTLER

Rights specialist at Disability Rights UK

Technology and Internet LÉONIE WATSON

Works with digital consultancy Nomensa

Specialist Equipment JOHN MANDRAK

Disability journalist and DLF helpline adviser

Travel

ANDY WRIGHT

MD of Accessible Travel, specialist tour operator

Money Management DAVID CLARKE

Senior partner with Clydesdale Bank

Access and Environment AGNES FLETCHER

Disability trainer and consultant

Property KATE SHEEHAN

Director, OT Practice, with special interest in housing

Motoring and Transport HELEN DOLPHIN

A director of Disabled Motoring UK

How can I survive after my daughter reaches 20?

Q I care for my 19-year-old daughter. When she is 20, I will no longer get the child components of her child benefit (she is in non-advanced education). This means my benefits will drop by about £100 a week. I know my daughter



Ken Butler of Disability Rights UK

says: A disabled

young person who is 16 years or over can (and must) make a claim for DLA in their own right.

A carer is eligible to receive Carer's Allowance (topped up if needed by income support) if the person being cared for receives the middle or higher care rate of DLA.

Both child benefit and child tax credit are only payable in relation to a young person under the age of 20 who is in full time non-advanced education.

This means that when she reaches 20 years old your daughter will need to make a claim for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

I'm not sure if there is an issue with your daughter being fully able to manage her own finances. If you feel she is unable to do this it is possible to ask the DWP to arrange for you to receive

can apply for ESA but dread her having to go through the stress of the wait and tribunal. What are carers of adult "children" supposed to do? My household running costs haven't changed. Am I supposed to ask my daughter for her ESA, if she gets it? I feel

her benefits and act for her.

Most disabled young people eventually want to become financially independent, but if they go on living with their parents they clearly need to discuss what level of financial contribution is appropriate for them to make to the household budget.

An important issue here is whether a reduction in your benefit income due to your daughter claiming benefit in her own right will lead to a drop in your overall household income.

You think that your own benefits income will drop by around £100 when your daughter reaches 20. Due to her age your daughter will only be paid £56.25 per week during her initial 13-week assessment phase.

If she is then awarded ESA her weekly entitlement will rise to either £99.15 or £105.15 depending on whether she is placed in the work-related activity group or support group.

humiliated. If I worked as a personal assistant for the council I would be paid £15 an hour. As it is, I get £52 a week. What has happened to the UK Carer's Poverty Charter? I hoped carers were going to be out of poverty by 2018.

Name withheld, by email

To ensure you both get your maximum benefit entitlement I strongly recommend that you both seek welfare rights advice from a local advice centre.

If your daughter is going on to attend another full-time education course and receives DLA she will automatically be deemed to pass the work capability assessment test to be paid means-tested income based ESA.

If she is not extending her studies she will probably need to attend a work capability medical examination to determine her eligibility for ESA. Should she be refused ESA she will need to submit an appeal.

Again, a local advice centre should be able to advise and support her through the ESA claim and, if necessary, the appeal process.

Disability Rights UK has a free downloadable factsheet on "Getting Advice" available at disabilityrightsuk.org/f15.htm.

How do I get a bay?

Q I'm disabled and get DLA mobility and care components at the highest level. Am I entitled to a disabled parking bay outside my house?
Nina Murray Dyer, by email



Helen Dolphin replies: You need to contact your local

council and ask for a disabled bay outside your home. The qualifying criteria do differ for each authority but you usually have to be a Blue Badge holder and the vehicle be registered at the address where you live.

The council will look at the safety of installing a bay as well as alternatives, such as your parking on a drive.

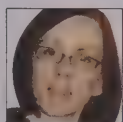
Once the local authority has agreed to instal a bay it will produce and publicise the Traffic Regulation Order (TRO). This can take months. The bay is then enforceable and will have a sign situated next to it stating "Disabled badge holders only". Motorists who then park in the bay without displaying a valid Blue Badge will be liable to a Penalty Charge Notice. Do be aware that even if the bay is outside your house it does not belong to you and any Blue Badge holder can park in it.



How can I tell if a hotel is really accessible?

Q Where can I find out about reliable hotels in the south of England that cater for disabled people? Just Googling for names does not tell you how good they are.

Maureen Stapleton, by email



Agnes Fletcher answers: The National Accessible Scheme

(NAS) is the only scheme that rates the accessibility of visitor accommodation throughout England. It also helps accommodation operators improve and promote their level of accessibility.

The NAS identifies how accessible accommodation is for people with difficulty walking, using a wheelchair or having a sensory impairment. The ratings are

categorised three ways for:

- mobility impaired people
- blind or visually impaired people
- deaf or hearing impaired people.

The individual ratings are represented by symbols displayed on websites and used in promotional literature such as the *Easy Access Britain* guidebook.

Easy Access Britain features more than 400 quality-assessed hotels, B&Bs, guesthouses, self-catering homes and camping or caravan parks throughout Britain that are members of the NAS. Accommodation entries include quality and accessibility ratings, photos,

contact information, prices, facilities, directions and special promotions, accessible travel information, a directory of services and ideas on where to go and what to do.

The guide is published by Tourism for All UK, a charity that champions accessibility in the tourism industry, and VisitBritain, the national tourism agency.

Tourism for All UK's website is tourismforall.org.uk and its email address is info@tourismforall.org.uk. It can be reached by phone on 0845 124 9971.

VisitBritain is on 020 7578 1400 and its website is visitbritain.org.

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pete's place

Benefits bingo



As the Government announces its new template for replacing DLA, **Peter White** tots up flaws in its thinking

I know the Paralympics is coming but isn't there something a bit dodgy about giving people marks out of 15 for their level of disability and only giving prizes to the ones with the highest score?

I got a queasy feeling about this the first time I came across it. It was 1995 and the Government had started using scores to lower the numbers of those on Incapacity Benefit. I asked

then how a scoring system dreamed up by a civil servant and judged by a bunch of predominantly ex-military doctors could work. How could the complex interplay of physical, cerebral and impressionistic factors that go to make up the effects of disability be chalked up as if it were a game of crib or a golf tournament?

As Invalidity Benefit was renamed Incapacity Benefit and then Employment

Support Allowance, we've seen just how much distress this system of medical assessments can cause, with its attempts to quantify the effect of conditions ranging from spinal injury and depression to partial sight and Asperger's syndrome.

But despite the repeated evidence that it doesn't produce fair results, here we go again. Exactly the same kind of scoring is being applied to the new benefit being brought in next year to replace Disability Living Allowance.

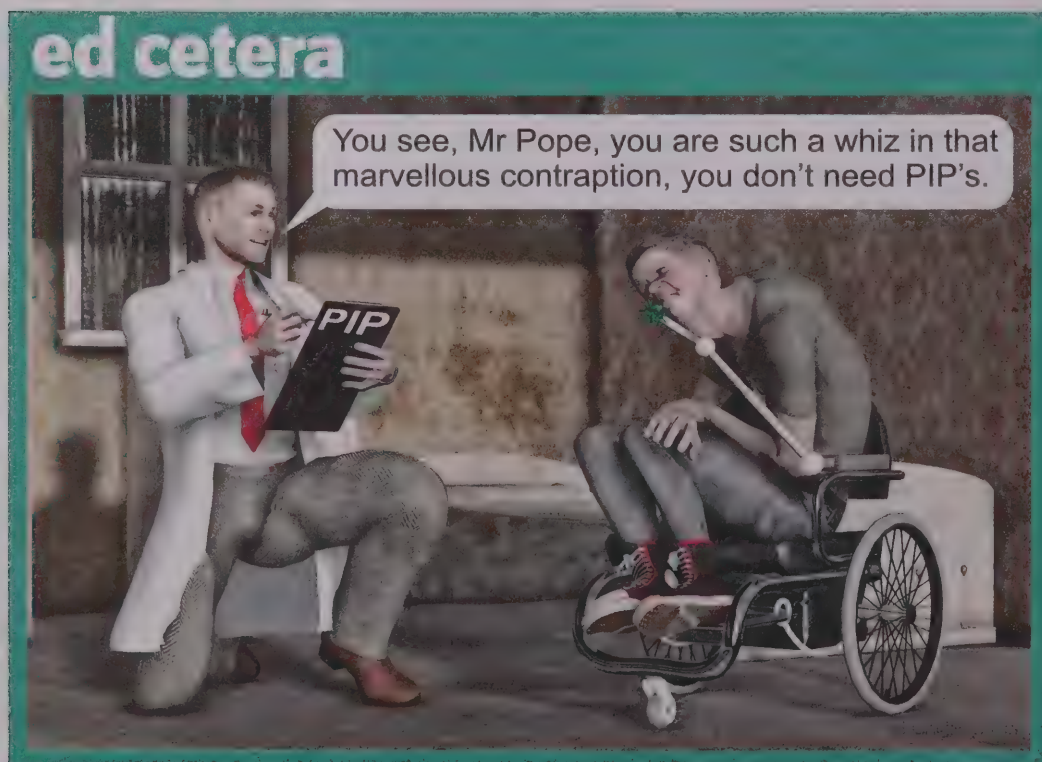
I've been through pages of arcane rules that allocate points for activities such as dressing, bathing, toileting, as if such personal activities

could be equated to stylish fencing moves. That would be bad enough, but when you look at your own disability (in my case blindness) and see a complete misunderstanding of the issues, it's enough to make you weep.

It looks, for instance, as if the second draft of "eligibility thresholds" will result in those who use a guide dog receiving the enhanced rate of benefit, while those using other mobility aids will not. Implication: use of a guide dog *per se* involves a greater degree of dependence and need than use of a white cane! I long to see how those who stress the independence that a dog gives you as one of their main fundraising planks will react to that.

The scoring system is based on mistrust and the belief that people will lie. It shouldn't be. We shouldn't base a fair system on people who are dishonest (there are other ways to detect them) but on a thoughtful synthesis of the many elements that go to make up daily living.

Perhaps we should dock points from the civil service for forgetting that we should be weighing up how to compensate people for the extra costs of disability, and not assessing which category of the Paralympics they should be competing in.





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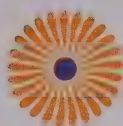
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guestcolumn



New offensive for the way ahead



Long time activist **Alan Holdsworth** argues that it's time for a revitalised movement with a new agenda to campaign for positive values in a new society

Ah, the old days when we campaigned for our ideas to become reality, handcuffing ourselves to buses to improve public transport and crawling outside parliament for the Disability Discrimination act. We campaigned for civil rights, justice and equality.

Compare this to today. We are campaigning against the cuts in benefits, against the reforms that we have not been part of creating

and our only allies seem to be on the far left.

I dare any campaigner to argue that the current welfare system and level of benefits is just hunky dory and this is what we are fighting for. Whilst some advocates point to discrimination that keeps many of us out of employment others argue that we can't work.

Ask anyone on benefits if they feel rich, if they feel they have the opportunity to rise out of poverty, if

they don't feel trapped, if they feel safe. They will probably answer no. Yet this is what we are campaigning for at the moment.

Where are the big ideas? What happened to the right for all to live in the community? What happened to the right for a decent education alongside everyone else? What happened to the right to meaningful employment?

Indeed what happened to a properly funded disability movement led by disabled

people? Where are the centres for independent living? Where are the Coalitions of Disabled People?

I'm certainly not saying that the proposed cuts and reforms should not be opposed or that the protesters are wrong. I'm just stating the obvious fact that in 2012 we seem to be on the defensive and when you are in your own half it's difficult to score a goal and win. Even if we win the benefit argument we will still be no better off.

I also feel that if we are to oppose welfare reform or benefit cuts we need a big idea of our own to put forward as an alternative. Put another way if we had our way what would the benefit system look like and how would it operate?

I am completely fed up that every time there is a financial crisis it is us disabled people they go after first. I am sick of being first in the firing line and perhaps our reforms would take us out of this.

To come up with our own version of welfare reform and to get the debate started we need to answer the basic questions of who decides if we qualify, if and when there needs to be a review, what criteria is used, is it means tested and if so at what level?

Alongside the answers to

these questions we need to ask ourselves what programmes do we need to design in order to bring about greater equality in employment and how can we encourage disabled people to look for and gain meaningful work. Our aim should be to ensure that everyone gets what they need to lift themselves out of poverty.

Advocates of the social model point out that with rights come responsibility. If we removed barriers to employment then it is our responsibility to find work.

In 2012 we seem to be on the defensive and when you are in your own half it's difficult to score a goal

I'm not saying that all barriers have been removed, far from it, but some have and with a disabled led vision of welfare reform we can remove more.

As a movement we need to rediscover and redefine our big ideas. The best way to challenge the cuts in

benefits is for us to put our heads together and design what we think would be a fair and just system for the 21st century and offer this as a counter proposal. Put simply we are not even in charge of the ideas at the moment.

To achieve this we must find ways of coming together, communicating, sharing and coalescing.

A priority and a challenge

is to rebuild refund and rediscover the disabled people's movement. This would be the best way to ensure that we are at least in control of the ideas for a better society. We are still the experts but it's time for all of us to be responsible and understand we are at our best when we work together. It's time to go on the offensive but to do that we need ideas and a plan.

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upclose & personal

Speaking out on schizophrenia

The media habitually portrays mental health conditions, and schizophrenia in particular, as frightening and to be spoken of only with difficulty. I have schizophrenia myself and I think, by contrast, that it's vital that experiences like mine should be spoken about openly and not sensationalised or hushed up.

The common notion of schizophrenics as having split personalities is a dangerous misconception. Schizophrenia does indeed mean "split mind" but the condition has varying degrees and symptoms. Schizophrenics can have good insight into their condition and along with good medication and support can manage their illness and day-to-day life.

With any illness, mental or physical, it's important to remember that with determination, guidance and a willingness to succeed, a person can maximise their capabilities within the limits of the severity of their disability.

What I've found, across different areas of society, is that prejudice can be harder to manage than the illness itself. I have a strong work ethic and desire to succeed,

Of all mental health conditions, it remains the one on which a hostile media out to shock is most likely to pounce. **John Pallister** says we should listen to those with direct experience, not the scaremongers

but I've struggled with being misunderstood or not supported in the various jobs that I've taken.

I've also been surprised by the gap within the health service itself between non-mental health doctors and nurses who were very much cut off from the mental health side. Patients with mental health difficulties may find that treatment for non-mental health problems is more difficult than for the rest of the population. Lots of people needing mental health services are reluctant to mention their mental health, which causes further problems where it has a bearing on non-mental health problems. What holds them back is fear of discrimination or lack of treatment.

It is therefore important that people feel comfortable talking about their mental health, especially at job interviews or in discussions about their health and welfare or housing.

I have been out of hospital for over five years now and although not working at the moment I have carried on trying to

keep occupied. I am an active campaigner, working and writing for the local paper, appearing on radio and talking to psychology students about my recovery.

These experiences have made me realise the huge steps still to be taken to overcome this stigma.

The growing willingness of some celebrities to talk about their mental health problems has been an eye-opener and shows how much we have moved on as a society. I'd like to see even more openness from society's role models.

My own symptoms began when I was 20 (I'm 31 now). The underlying causes are not clear but seem to have been stress related. I experienced paranoia, hallucinations (hearing voices) and delusions, along with an acute phase of psychosis. The episodes were intense; thankfully they were also short.

Other symptoms of schizophrenia can include mood swings, depression, manic behaviour and what I would call a flat feeling.

Medication can control all

these symptoms but I found that the best medical response was support. Too often, people are over-medicated or forced back into society where they can't achieve anything valuable or enjoy an active and meaningful life. Helping someone gain insight into their condition is often the most powerful way of preventing or managing mental health problems.

There are lots of support groups that can help people in this respect, but unless you have an illness or an interest in mental health they can be hard to find, leaving sufferers struggling and undiagnosed. I'm sure that if I'd known 12 years ago what I know now, I could have sought help from the relevant sources and prevented or managed my symptoms much earlier and more actively.

I'd urge support groups not only to reach out much more to the diagnosed but to make themselves better known to the public. People need to be encouraged to talk about their concerns and come forward if they start to be aware that they might have an early onset of an illness. That's what I'm committed to doing in my own work.



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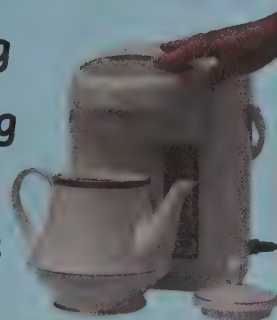
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High street in your home

From time to time everybody needs a little advice and guidance with looking good, but if you're disabled you might find most of the advice available isn't much help. At last, says **Mik Scarlet**, all that could be changing with the creation of a new online resource

It's a big ambition: to come up with a website which aims to make the world of fashion truly inclusive and give answers to the style issues that disabled people face on a daily basis.

As I enter the brightly lit photographic studio, the floor is covered in piles of clothes. In one corner kneeling on the floor Tiffany Dhani, fashion marketing student and the face behind Style Ramp, is ironing a pink shirt. She gives me a broad grin and waves me in. The models, Alexandra M L Webster, Tyler Saunders, Andrew Babs-Apata and Catriona Stuart, are all busy being made up or getting into their clothes. Photographer Rei Bennett, who is fast becoming the go to girl for glamorous photos of disabled people, just puts

the finishing touches to the lighting and is raring to go. With a flash, things are underway and style and fashion pops from every angle.

During a break I grab the chance to chat with Tiffany.

"The goal of the website is to provide accessible styling tips," she says.

"We're going to tell you all the current high street fashions and current style trends out there and then give you advice on how to adapt it to suit you, so you can create your own personal style. There's a real lack of resources out there for people with impairments on how to dress around their personal issues. Able-bodied people have it easy with that kind of information being everywhere, in magazines, websites and on TV and this website aims to redress that balance.

"As the site grows we are hoping to become more editorially and visually creative. We want to push the boundaries of how fashion is covered, especially always using disabled models which will be a first, as well as the types of clothing we feature, but we do want to primarily focus on the mainstream high street trends. We really hope that we open the eyes of the fashion industry, as we plan to do the stuff they just aren't doing and providing the images they just don't have. So maybe they'll peep over at our site and go 'Hey, what you doing over there?'

"Today's shoot is the first fashion shoot for the site, and I decided early on



PHOTOGRAPHY BY REI BENNETT



that we can't use able-bodied models. If I was to use the available images, all the models are able-bodied and that would be pointless as that's not the audience we are aiming at. Today we are going to create our own images that show how to wear the clothes, that prove that disabled people can look great and can be fantastic models.

"We are using a mixture of outfits. Five of the pieces were given to us by Debenhams, some will be the models own clothing and then we are using some great dresses designed by one of the models, Catriona, with her label Kitty Crème. I am hoping in the future to get more clothing from the high street, to show the market that there is a demand out there and to give our users an idea of how to look good and on trend. But I have big ambitions, and



want to have a lifestyle section, stuff on relationships, travel... well everything you find in a fashion magazine.

"My Dad is a wheelchair-user so I've

been brought up with disability all around me. One day one of our family friends, who is also disabled, asked me 'Tiffany what shall I wear?' when she was going to an event, and it hit me that there is nowhere to find this kind of information. So I decided to put that right. Having said that, I want to make Style Ramp a vehicle for disabled people to share style tips and I plan to get a stable of disabled talent to write for the site alongside my articles. And if there are any disabled fashion designers out there please get in touch!"

Tiffany has already landed pieces from Lara Masters, Catriona Stuart, some bloke called Mik Scarlet and an interview with Ade Adepitan. The site will go live in July and may change the face of fashion for good.

• styleramp.co.uk



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Andalusia

History ancient and modern

If the rain in Spain stays mainly in the plane, **Mark Davidson** chose to walk in the hills and mountains of the Spanish hinterland where he found relics of recent war, evidence of a Moorish past and, of course, familiar Spanish sustenance

Flying to Malaga would either be for many people the apotheosis of the perfect Spanish holiday or a trip into tourist hell for others. Yet a 90 minute drive away from the airport will take you to some of the most spectacular scenery in Spain.

Here, I enjoyed some of the most unspoilt and remote landscapes of Andalusia. Based amidst the lovely whitewashed houses of Canillas de Albaida, on the edge of the rugged mountains of the Sierra Tejeda Natural Park, I explored an ancient network of mule tracks and trails that took me through an idyllic region of Moorish villages, olive groves and vineyards.

However, as I travelled by minibus, the winding roads with a sheer drop at

times, were enough to make your stomach churn. The driver was full of confidence and knew every turn well, almost knowing when a car would come round a blind bend and knowing when to brake at the last moment.

On my arrival in the small village, I was greeted by Gustavo, the owner of the hotel; a flamboyant character who took great pride in running the place. Forget big hotels. There is nothing more pleasant than staying in a small, family run establishment. No room the same size, each with a different ensemble of furniture. You are often woken in the morning to the sound of church bells heralding the dawn of a new day.

One evening, before dinner, the bells were rung with gusto as we were told

someone in the area had died. In a short space of time, the village square became populated by all the local men, with all the women filling the church. Every one, it seemed, had turned out to pay their respects. It was clearly apparent these small villages are deeply religious.

Built amongst mountains, houses on either side of the narrow streets are never level with each other, yet the views overlooking the countryside made this way of living worthwhile.

Did you know?

The complete name of the Alhambra Palace is "Qal'at al-Hamra", which means "The Red Fortress".



PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK DAVIDSON



The fresh air and the idyllic slow pace of life is ideal for those who want a quiet life. Occasionally though, the peace was broken by young motorcyclists who rode through the streets with carefree abandon making a lot of noise.

The first day's trekking is always more of a challenge than any other. It's like having to get a bit of match fitness. The limbs ached all that bit more as I climbed up and down the mountain sides on varying terrain. The paths, carved out over centuries by farmers and locals alike, are a network of trails connecting the villages. Fruit trees were abundant and it was nice to see avocados growing alongside the orange groves.

When I reached my first village, Competa, I was almost blinded, not by the sunlight, but by the brilliant white paint of each building as it glistened in the rays of the sun. With roof tiles

Clockwise from top left: The Alhambra, architecture of the palace, ornate design and the view from the palace →

Did you know?

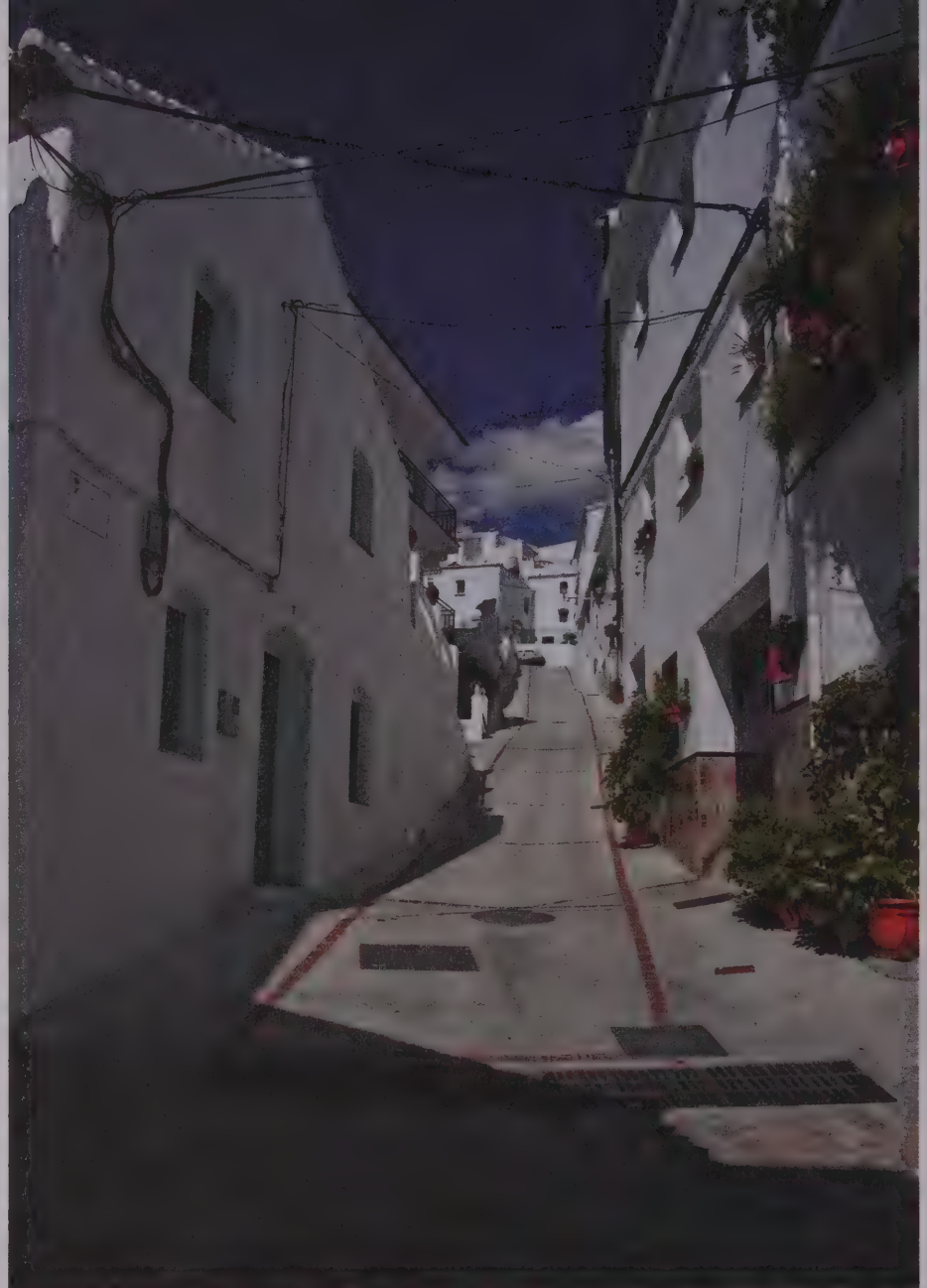
Andalusia produces one of the most famous wines in the world, sherry, grown in the area around Jerez de la Frontera and Sanlúcar de Barrameda in the province of Cadiz.

made from bright red terracotta, the homes were in stark contrast to the lush green surroundings of the countryside. The slow pace of life seemed a deliberate act. No one seemed to want the hustle and bustle of living in a big Spanish tourist resort. Villages have no shortage of bars, but it is a pleasant and relaxing way to unwind with a cold refreshing drink.

What better way to end a fabulous walk than with fantastic food? Tapas, the Spanish version of appetisers, are plentiful and there is no shortage of food on offer in the many restaurants in this area. Paella is common in these parts. Made from traditional ingredients of Bomba rice and a mixture of meat, often rabbit or chicken and seafood, depending on the season, all coloured and flavoured with fragrant saffron.

As I meandered along each day, I was often reminded of the history of the Spanish Civil War as I passed derelict buildings that once stored arms and weapons used in the conflict. It is thought many more weapons still lay undiscovered in the mountain ranges. I even learned that during the Civil War protection rackets were rife and travellers would pay money to ensure they would not be sitting ducks from the hidden locations on the mountains where a lone gunman would often lay in wait.

The arrival of the Moors in the 8th century brought silk manufacture to the Iberian Peninsula and these ancient trails are littered with the



Street in Competa

historical reminders of those once lucrative journeys across Arabia and into the Islamic heartlands of southern Europe.

Goats provide an income for many of the local farmers. It was not uncommon to see a dead goat hung on a fence as we walked by. I was told that if any wild dogs attacked the herds then the dead goat would be left out as a warning to others in the area.

During one day's walking, I made my way to the village of Sayalonga; meaning long dress. It was the first chance to try a Spanish omelette. A generous portion, accompanied by

fresh salad and washed down with a 'Clara'; local lager and lemonade mixed together.

Climbing up through these idyllic rural settings, I reached the summit of Cerro Verde (1,346m), a peak similar in height to Ben Nevis. I enjoyed a picnic lunch at the top, savouring the fresh Andalusian air as I looked out across the limestone landscapes. It was amazing how quickly I ascended and descended within a short space of time, often gaining a few hundred feet within hours each day. Ants were a problem every time you wanted to sit on a rock, millions of them going



Top: Spanish countryside, bottom: overlooking local village



about their daily tasks. They have a nasty bite and it is advisable to check your hat and clothing before resuming the walk.

As for those with a disability, it is certainly not for wheelchair-users. However, if like me, you can walk under your own steam then it is possible to do the treks unaided. A solid trekking pole

might be the order of the day for those unsure of their footing.

Amongst the trees and plant life were many vineyards producing fine wine. A few years ago, it was considered wines from this region lacked the quality of their French counterparts. However, nowadays, many expensive red and white

varieties are produced in this area.

Unlike other vineyards, the grapes are left to the mercy of the elements and are not watered or tended, giving a rich full flavour.

Aside from walking, there is an opportunity to go to Granada for a day trip and visit the impressive Alhambra Palace. Initially constructed during the mid-14th century by the Moorish rulers, it is comprised of many palaces and fortifications added over the centuries by Kings, Queens and rulers who lived in this part of Spain. The city of Granada is steeped in history and it has its own fortified wall built in the eighth and ninth centuries to repel unwelcome invaders.

All in all, this is a lovely area of Spain to visit. ■

Trip details

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The pen that's mightier than the word

For people with dyslexia, one of life's trickier tasks is importing **text one** from **source** into a document you're writing. **Warren Kirwan** tries out the C-Pen, a hand-held **scanner** which could be of help

The C-Pen looks like a device that Dr McCoy from *Star Trek* would be waving around over a groaning C-rate actor who is about to get better very quickly.

It does a simple job – it scans text and then lets you put it where you want. A quick way to scan, upload text, share it using Dropbox or Google Docs, edit, and even listen to the text you've scanned.

All sounds good in theory, but I fell at the first hurdle.

The instructions feel like they have been thrown together by a sixth former rushing to complete an assignment. It could be that dyslexia and instructions just don't go together (that happens quite a bit and it just takes time before everything clicks). Not sure how someone with a visual impairment would go about tackling them.

The pen can connect to my PC through Bluetooth or a USB cable. And the allure of not using a cable was too hard to resist. But, icons flashed, the



instruction booklet crashed and I reverted to the cable.

First up I'm going to try it out on my trusty copy of the *New Statesman* and scan: The Owen referendum plan on Europe is the right one.

I received: Th A riiAfonon fiurope is ine riKm one.

Clearly more work is needed here.

The second bash (the scanner didn't like the bump in the paper): foreign secretary and the leader of the Social Democrat Party – left me with: Foreign secretary and leader of theic Party.

Although I'm being a bit

frustrated with getting started I'm beginning to be impressed with the scanner. Thinking back to my salad days this might have been very useful when hopping between text book, pamphlet, journal, printed chapter etc.

Damn – the dialogue/control box has gone walkabout again! It could be me and there is a sneaking suspicion that the pen, or controlling this one, is mightier than the man.

Oh, update, Bluetooth is paired but not connected, wait, success I'm now connected using Bluetooth. Time to remove my cable

and my heart soars slightly (even if that is a little sad).

Being fair, apart from installation teething troubles, there is much that could be useful with the C-Pen, and I can see how a younger me who hasn't already developed quite a few "work-arounds" for dyslexia would have benefited.

I should have given myself more time. A couple of hours at the end of a busy day is not enough. And it's worth noting that there are other useful looking things like dictionaries and a translation function.

helen dolphin



Crash-test campaign to end WAV risk



A leading disabled motoring organisation says that adapted vehicles for use by wheelchair-users could be unsafe, putting drivers and passengers at risk. **Helen Dolphin** reports

I'm sure many people have seen crash testing on the TV where a dummy is strapped into the body of a car, which is then put through a head-on collision to check the vehicle can withstand a real-life accident. I'm always amazed when I see these tests carried out what a mess the vehicle looks like afterwards but it's reassuring to know that a

vehicle has been put through these tests. However, what I hadn't realised until recently was that for those people who travel in wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) the vehicle, which may have undergone significant structural changes such as lowering the floor, may not be put through this kind of testing after it's been converted. This could mean

that the safety of a wheelchair-user is compromised as until a car has been sled tested you have no way of knowing whether it can hold or restrain a wheelchair-user in an accident

To ensure the safety of WAVs the charity for which I work, Disabled Motoring UK has launched a campaign called "No compromises" which seeks

to change legislation so that only "sled tested" vehicles can be sold. A sled test is similar to the crash test but is carried out after the adaptation has occurred and checks that both the belts and their fixings are strong enough to withstand an accident and keep the wheelchair-user secure. This would ensure that converted vehicles, like the original cars, have to pass a test that simulates a real-life accident.

From 29 April 2012, WAVs have had to meet new European standards, but only the highest standard requires sled testing to check the changes made during the conversion process.

Smaller converters are allowed to use different tests, which it has been shown do not always predict the outcome of any subsequent sled test. Although the Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle Converters Association (WAVCA) recently introduced new standards (PAS2012) to sit alongside European legislation these only call for sled testing on vehicles that carry wheelchairs weighing 85kg or more.

David Constable, Managing Director of Constables Mobility, one of the experts supporting the campaign

on behalf of his company which adapts vehicles for wheelchair-users explains: "People who travel in wheelchairs have a right to a vehicle that has been properly tested so they are as safe as possible in the event of an accident. I strongly believe that all companies who convert cars should only be allowed to sell them if they have been successfully tested after conversion – including being sled tested – so the vehicle meets and exceeds the latest European safety

standards. It's a moral and human right to have a car that has been converted safely."

Graham Footer, CEO of Disabled Motoring UK, said: "It is amazing that vehicles are being sold that may not be safe for the drivers and their disabled passengers and we feel strongly that this must stop. We will be calling on the Government to change legislation so that people don't unknowingly purchase unsafe vehicles. Alongside this we will be educating people to make sure they

ask the right questions before purchasing."

The simple way to check whether a WAV meets these standards is to ask to see its certification. Sled tested WAVs will have an ECWVTA.M1 certificate. But do check that the certificate is for the conversion, not the original car.

At the moment figures on accidents involving WAVs are not collected so it is impossible to say how many wheelchair-users may have been injured because the vehicle had

not been sled tested. However, since some convertors do sled testing and others don't this is now another question for customers to be asking when buying a WAV.

Disabled Motoring UK is running a petition to make sled testing compulsory for all converted vehicles and improve the safety of WAV users. To sign the petition visit:

epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/34003

• For more information on sled testing visit sledtesting.co.uk

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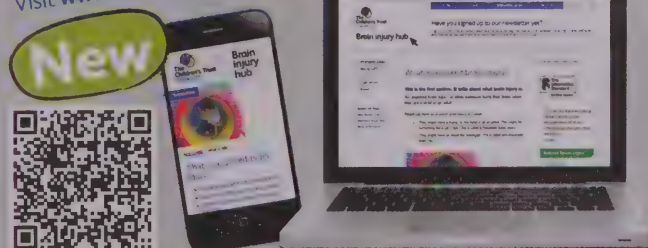
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By Paul Carter

World Cup triumph trailer for London 2012

Hopes are high for Paralympic success following a strong showing in team sports in Manchester.

The British win followed a dramatic final day of wheelchair basketball and 7-a-side football at Manchester Regional Arena in which the team picked up three medals, though none of them gold.

GB's cerebral palsy 7-a-side football team and the men's wheelchair basketballers both finished the competition with silver medals, while the women's wheelchair basketball team were unlucky to lose in their third-place play-off match with the much fancied USA.

GB men's wheelchair basketball coach Murray Treseder was disappointed though not to take the gold medal. "We could have won that game, but we just had a few moments where we lost concentration and consistency," he said. "The boys showed a lot of spirit, though and that is important. They came back at the USA after the first quarter and gave a great show."

Earlier in the week, Great Britain beat the Czech Republic in an enthralling boccia series, with brothers Stephen and Peter McGuire representing the hosts, while Oscar Pistorius, Jeremy



Great Britain's disabled sporting stars showed they had real potential in advance of this summer's upcoming Paralympic Games by becoming the winners of the BT Paralympic World Cup Team Trophy 2012 in Manchester

Campbell and Graeme Ballard all starred in the athletics on the opening day of competition, with

the latter two setting world records in the discus and the T36 100m respectively.

Pistorius meanwhile

remains on course to compete in the Olympic Games, though it looks ever more likely he may have to

settle for a position on the relay team only.

"The crowd were really supportive and the track was dry, which is rare for Manchester. The competition was tough which pushed me to run faster," he said.

Fellow sprinter Jonnie Peacock, tipped as a British rival to Pistorius, cruised to a new British record in the 100m. "It was great to get some more race experience, as that is what we really learn from," he said. "The crowd here today and the reception we got was amazing and that is great

experience to take with me to London."

The competition closed with women's wheelchair basketball and Watford athlete Helen Freeman, who studies in the US at the University of Illinois, was understandably pleased with her team's performance despite losing against the USA 40 points to 51.

Freeman, who was the game's leading scorer with 20 points, said: "It was disappointing to lose, but we played really well and it was a challenging game. What it showed was that

there is not a lot separating us from the very top teams in the world and with a bit of work we can hopefully raise our game in London and put ourselves in contention for a medal.

"We have got a lot of training camps ahead of us. We are off to the USA in a couple of weeks for a camp and also to play the USA again. This is all great experience for us: the more we play tough teams the better we get and it puts us in a better place for London.

"The home crowd this week has been amazing,

better than any other year and it just gave us a taste of what London will be like with the home advantage: it will give us a huge boost and motivate us to play the best basketball we can play."

The women's wheelchair basketball competition was eventually won by Germany, who beat Australia 47-40 in the final. Over the five days of competition, more than 200 athletes from 30 countries competed in front of more than 11,000 spectators, with some of the events being screened on Channel 4.

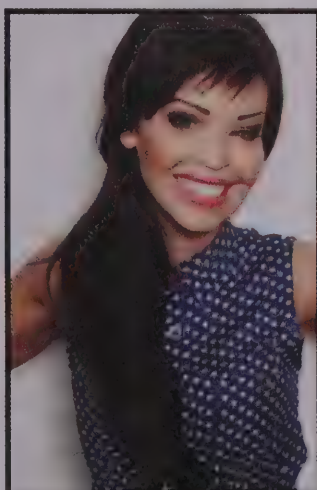
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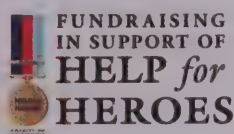
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The art of noise

Sound art is one of the less familiar parts of the cultural scene, but **Ian Macrae** hears how, for one artist it provides huge creative challenges and opportunities

For sound artist Amie Slavin (pictured opposite), it's a bit like a painter having not just to mix the paints, but also construct the frame and weave the canvas on which the picture will be delivered. In other words she has to devise the medium as well as create the work.

For one of her current projects, that means designing and building the place where the work can be experienced.

"It's a bloody great inflatable spiral. It's a big space with a footprint of around 6 by 12 metres. It's designed to stand inside or out so it's made to withstand gale force winds. And it's ballasted by water. There are a series of eight tubes, each about a metre and a half in diameter. So it's a bit like a bouncy castle, but inside out and a bit skew-whiff."

Each of the tubes contains six loudspeakers strategically placed to create the spiral effect she's

after for her new sound art installation, *Babel Spring*.

"*Babel Spring* begins with an original piece of prose which has been translated into 41 languages. So there are 42 voices coming into the space. The first language is Spanish, and that's followed by a second language and voice in a second speaker: so it becomes a kind of procession, a train of voices."

That leaves six speakers waiting to be used. But in the finished work, they play out what the artist refers to

as "chirrup", more or less random snatches of words submitted via the SoundSpiral website by members of the public.

"We end up with 48 voices all playing in the space and then they begin to melt down. There's kind of a breakdown moment where each voice loses clarity. Then they become musical instruments so that they then join together to play one unified piece of music which has been composed by my collaborator."

While it may seem totally



intuitive for a blind artist to work in the medium of sound, Slavin's creativity was in fact born out of frustration arising from the barriers she faced in finding other, more conventional (and almost certainly more lucrative) forms of employment.

"I spent a good ten years trying to find means of gainful employment with a good honours degree, a high IQ and the gift of the gab and I still didn't manage to find any conventional way to make a living. Lots of things to do, but nothing that took me out of the voluntary sector. Then strangely I hit on this supposedly most difficult sector of all. To be a practising artist, I never would have set out thinking that was a realistic ambition. Much of it is

incredibly tough, but it's something that I've found I can actually make my way in and make a career."

As an artist who mixes sound with other media including photography, some of Slavin's work requires and relies on collaboration. But she sees all of what she does as collaborative.

"My work is very genuinely about public involvement and participation. It's a massive privilege to do what I do for a living and I think I have a massive responsibility to make my work belong to other people as much as possible."

While working in sound might look like her comfort zone, it presents its own set of problems and challenges, partly because of the scale of Slavin's work.

"After these two projects I have to say I'm going to be altering my style of work because it is absolutely high stress going after funding and managing this scale of work. The problem that we have with sound arts is the price of the hardware and the software and the complexity of making it happen."

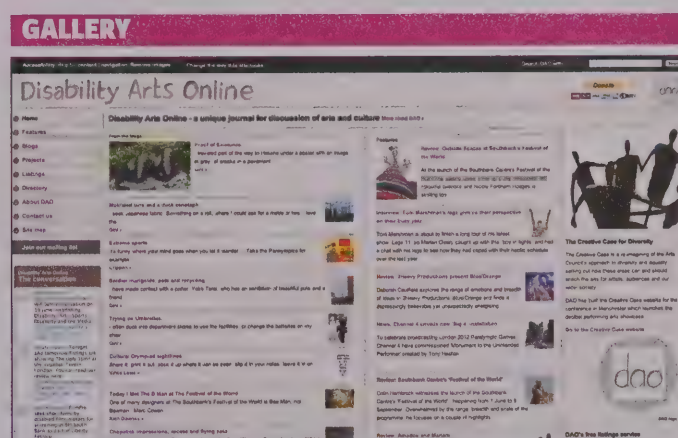
And once each installation has run its course, she's still left with this "bloody great

inflatable". But she has plans for that.

"We want to use it educationally, for hospitality and as a venue; it would make a lovely venue for all sorts of performance and music."

• SoundSpiral is at X-church in Gainsborough from 15-17 June

• Visit soundspiral.net for more details of future shows and to add your "chirrup"



Wanted: digital artists

Disability Arts Online has partnered with The Pallant House Gallery's Outside In project to produce work for the Diverse Perspectives initiative. **Colin Hambrook** outlines what they're looking to commission

Since I first was involved with Outside In at Pallant House Gallery as a judge during its early incarnation in 2007, I've

been impressed by the way that the project places emphasis on creativity as a part of our lives, not simply the preserve of celebrity visual artists who so often

are simply one-idea wonders.

And for disabled people who've had extra barriers to traverse in order to get into the arts machine in the first place, Outside In is important as a place of encouragement and facilitation. Anyone can create an online digital gallery as part of it; and there have been a series of events offering one-to-one help for those who are not so adept with a computer to get their gallery uploaded.

What DAO is doing, is to commission a digital artist to collaborate with

Outside In artists to make a series of short, moving image, digital works that can be showcased on the Disability Arts Online and Outside In websites and that can tour as part of the Outside In exhibitions that will be shown in galleries across the UK between March 2013 and April 2014.

We are looking for digital artwork that is accessible and aesthetically exciting. The important thing for us is that it tells the story of the artists' creativity, their technique and where their imagination goes when they create.

Not quite Rolf Harris, but along those lines. An inspiration for this commission was a piece of digital film visually impaired artist Sally Booth made, many years ago. She made a landscape painting on glass, which she filmed from below. The film captured the artist's delight in playing with paint to produce a dynamic artwork.

Over the coming weeks we'll be choosing a digital artist and working with

them to support a collaboration from among the many hundreds of artists who have now created galleries on the Outside In website. The plan is to showcase the work online in time for the National Outside In (outsidein.org.uk) competition to be shown at Pallant House Gallery, Chichester in October 2012.

• Visit disabilityarts.org.uk for details of how to apply

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worklife

I knew from childhood that I wanted to work in the helping professions, so as soon as I was 18 I started training as a nurse.

The trouble was that my toes pointed outwards and caused me pain. My doctors told me not to worry but when the pain got worse, I changed to social work because it involves more sitting and talking to people and less standing up.

Being a social worker is a great job and I wanted to excel in it, so I did extra training in mental health and teaching, and got an MA degree. Meanwhile, as my health problems got worse, I was diagnosed with Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease which affects the long nerves to the hands and feet.

I struggled at work. At first I went part time, then left completely, planning to work short-term contracts when I was well enough. I went back to work briefly with an agency and then applied to my nearest local authority when I felt able to work for six months again.

Because they don't use the full interview system for agency staff, my problem didn't become an issue until I was interviewed for a longer-term job. I explained that I could only work in short bursts, with rests in between, and admitted that although I'd done my best to keep up to date, I might



Social un-worker

Being disabled can force you to take time out from work or work differently. **Lynne Pardoe** tells of the difficulties she faced finding re-employment as a social worker with special experience after a break

have missed things. On the positive side, I made clear that my core competence, of working with very difficult people, was still intact.

The interview seemed to go well. The panel seemed supportive, saying that it had lots of opportunities for me to work with them. I was therefore shocked when the chair of the panel phoned the next day to say that I hadn't scored enough points to be offered a post.

He encouraged me to try again. I did so. I was more nervous this time but did my best and read up as much as possible. The day after my interview I got another call, again saying

that I hadn't scored enough points. Apparently I didn't come across as someone with 20 years' experience.

I got four interviews, each time with the same outcome. In the end I was told that unless something changed I wouldn't be offered any

more interviews again.


I was being beaten in the labour market by novice graduates who'd been taught interview skills at university. This was in spite of the fact that newly qualified applicants are limited in what they can do. They can't take on child protection, for example. I can, and have rather a lot of experience in it. It hasn't made any difference.

There's a refresher scheme for people to return to social work but it rarely runs. To make things worse, from this autumn I won't be eligible to work any longer. All social workers have to re-register every three years and you need to have had 15 days training in that time, but you can't train if you're not working. That means I can't re-register.

I've left social work now. There are lots of opportunities that would suit me, but my local authority says I can't apply unless I can be more persuasive. It seems my skills aren't needed.

LYNNE PARDOE: CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

- 1974-76 Auxiliary nurse, learning disabilities
- 1976-83 Auxiliary nurse for older people
- 1985-88 Completion of social work course
- 1988-1990 Social worker for Cumbria. Completed extra training required for mental health specialism
- 1990-95 Social worker in Leeds. Trained as a practice teacher
- 1996-97 Care Manager for adult services
- 1997-1998 Joint post: social worker and out-of-hours specialist
- 1998-2006 Caring for child
- 2008-2009 Child care social worker



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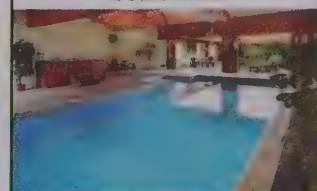
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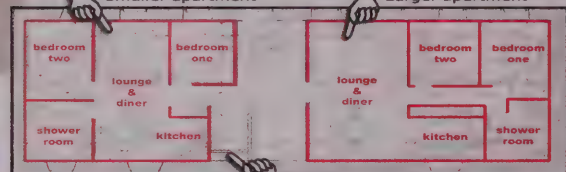
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DN DEADLINE: August 2012 published 26 July.
Classified deadlines: Booking: 2 July. Copy: 4 July.

backlash

One damned thing after another

What with trying to cope with a rather destructive puppy, running a business and generally being a bit crap at being a fully functioning adult operating within the accepted parameters of a decent society, it's fair to say I've been a bit stressed lately.

Add to this list the fact I have a mental health condition, things get even more complicated. Yes, this is me coming out, do you like it? I won't bore you with details, but I have a (relatively mild) form of depression.

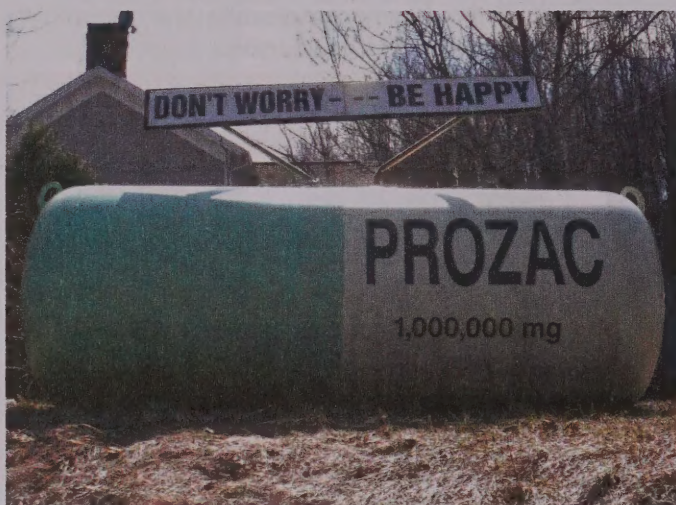
The most enlightening thing with starting to tell this to people though has been the barely concealed incredulity that some react with. I can almost see them thinking "you can't be head disabled AS WELL. That's just CRUEL."

One of my favourite pastimes at the minute is to visit a different pharmacy each time I go just to see the face of the pharmacist when he goes to make up my prescription. I'm pretty sure I could mop the pity up with a bag of cotton balls.

Once you've told one person though it gets



The problem with being Mr Laughter, says **Paul Carter**, is that sometimes life gets serious



“It's a bit like vomiting. Takes a while to get going but once you've started it's hard to stop”

easier. It's a bit like vomiting. Takes a while to get going but once you've started it's hard to stop.

Truth is though it's just a part of who I am. Winston Churchill famously described his depression as a black dog. I don't see my golden labrador as my depression, he's an idiot who eats pigs ears and walks into things, but I see mine as more of a little

balloon tied to my back. It's always there, and sometimes it's annoying, but I actually quite like it in a weird way.

What it has taught me is not to underestimate the value of and attitudes of other people, particularly those you know and trust. I held off for ages telling anybody – partly because of a perceived stigma, and partly because I thought it was a sign of weakness. I couldn't have been more wrong to be honest. Everyone has been lovely and understanding and accommodating and kind. Even when I've been a bit crap at getting stuff done

“The most enlightening thing with starting to tell this to people though has been the barely concealed incredulity that some react with”

on time and staying in bed watching Jeremy Kyle. Seriously, that show is the best cure in the whole known universe if you're ever having issues with low self-esteem and low mood. It's impossible not to feel superior after an hour of that. I implore the NHS to prescribe it, it's way better than any therapy I've ever had.

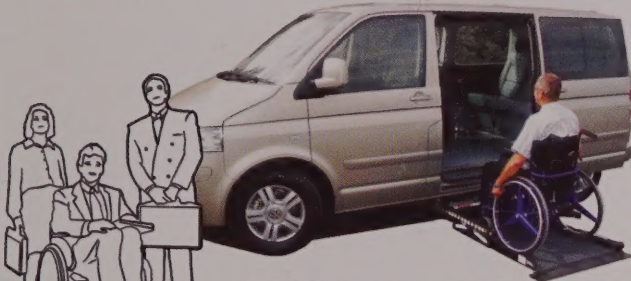
Truth be told, it's not as scary as you might think. Most people have reacted with mild indifference. Although that's often the reaction I get from people so that might just be me, I'm not sure. The dog doesn't care, that's for sure. I'll leave you with the words of a good friend of mine who didn't so much as bat an eyelid. "Oh. Explains why you're a miserable shit sometimes, then." Exactly, folks. Exactly.

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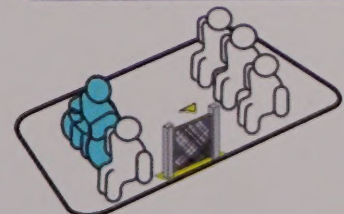
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